

Piety, Politics, and Art in Fifteenth-Century Venetian Crete

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In 1611, the nobleman Andrea Cornaro, a prominent member of one of the oldest and most prestigious feudatory Latin families of Crete, drew up his will. Alongside his financially significant bequests to relatives and dependents and to an impressive number of both Catholic and Orthodox monasteries on the island, Andrea made a more personal bequest, which his brother Cavaliero was to take care of in person: the marble head he keeps on his desk and two icons from his room should be sent to Venice, to the “*illustrissimo signor Aluiso Zorzi*” as small tokens of his esteem and respect.¹ Andrea gives a brief description of the two icons: one is a small triptych of the type called *sfalichtari* in Greek, and the other a panel with the sacred monogram JHS in historiated letters. He explicitly states in his will, “*tutte duo esse imagini cose pretiose per pittura greca*” (i.e., both these images are

valuable for Greek painting). Myrtali Acheimastou-Potamianou has identified the second of these with a remarkable icon in the Byzantine Museum of Athens that perfectly fits the brief description in Cornaro’s last will and testament and remains to this day a *unicum* (fig. 1).² The icon in Athens offers a rare depiction of the emblem of the Franciscan order popularized by Saint Bernardino of Siena, with depictions of the Crucifixion and two versions of the Resurrection inscribed in the letters. It exemplifies a rare adaptation of the aniconic, symbolic power of the word—the holy name of Christ that Saint Bernardino promoted—to the visual vocabulary that sprang from the encounter between Byzantium and Italy.³ Along the bottom edge of the panel a much later Greek inscription with a chant from the Parakletike (sung in the Sunday orthros) and the signature of the Cretan painter Andreas Ritzos are

1 S. Spanakis, “Η διαθήκη του Ανδρέα Τζάκ. Κορνάρου (1611),” *Κρ. Χρον.* 9 (1955): 379–486, esp. 427. For an English translation of the relevant passage of the will, see *Renaissance Art Reconsidered: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, ed. C. M. Richardson, K.W. Woods, and M. W. Franklin (Malden, MA, 2007), 370. N. Panayiotakis, “Έρευναι εν Βενετία,” *Θησαυρίσματα* 5 (1968): 45–118; S. Alexiou, “Η διαθήκη του Κορνάρου και ο ποιητής του Ερωτόκριτου,” *Κρ. Χρον.* 11 (1957): 49–64; S. Kaklamanis, “Ειδήσεις για την πνευματική ζωή στον Χάνδακα από το 16ο βιβλίο της ‘Istoria Candiana’ του Ανδρέα Κορνάρου,” in *Παιδεία και πολιτισμός στην Κρήτη: Βυζάντιο–Βενετοκρατία; Μελέτες αφιερωμένες στον Θεοχάρη Δετοράκη*, ed. I. Vassis, S. Kaklamanis, and M. Loukaki (Herakleion, 2008), 115–249 with exhaustive bibliography (for references to Luigi Aluiso Zorzi, see the table on p. 176).

2 M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, “Δύο εικόνες του Αγγέλου και του Ανδρέα Ρίτζου στο Βυζαντινό Μουσείο,” *Δελτ. Χριστ. Αρχ. Ετ.* 15 (1989–1990): 105–18; R. Cormack, *Painting the Soul: Icons, Death Masks and Shrouds* (London, 1997), 206–8; *Heaven and Earth: Art of Byzantium from Greek Collections*, ed. A. Drandaki, D. Papanikola-Bakirtzi, and A. Tourta, exhibition catalogue, National Gallery of Art–Washington D.C., The J. P. Getty Museum–Los Angeles, The Art Institute of Chicago (Athens, 2013), 322–24, no. 171 (K.-P. Kalafati).

3 M. Bacci, “The Holy Name of Jesus in Venetian-Ruled Crete,” *Convivium* 1 (2014): 190–205. For a different interpretation, U. Ritzerfeld, “In the Name of Jesus: The ‘IHS’-Panel from Andreas Ritzos and the Christian Kabbalah in Renaissance Crete,” *Journal of Transcultural Medieval Studies* 2 (2015): 245–73.



Fig. 1. Icon with JHS. Crete, second half of the fifteenth century. Athens, Byzantine and Christian Museum, inv. no. BXM 1549 (photo: Byzantine and Christian Museum)

inscribed in gold letters on a black band with the ends rolled up to resemble a parchment or leather scroll. The restoration of the icon in the Conservation Lab of the Byzantine Museum of Athens revealed that this inscription repeats and overlays an earlier one, written in white letters against an azure blue background, but the painter's signature was not discernible in the earlier lettering. Thus, in my opinion the question of the panel's attribution remains open, especially as the surviving JHS panel varies significantly in iconography and style from icons signed by or securely attributed to Andreas Ritzos.⁴

4 In his will Andrea Cornaro says nothing about a painter's signature on his precious icon, and it seems to me that had this information been available to him, he would have mentioned it. On the other hand, despite the obvious similarities between the existing panel and Cornaro's brief description we should not dismiss out of hand the possibility that there was more than one Cretan icon

Regardless of the icon's attribution, what triggered my interest in this bequest is Cornaro's characterization of an icon that at first glance looks so profoundly Italian in iconography and so clearly Catholic in destination as valuable for Greek painting. Of course, Cornaro knew very well what he was talking about. He was a learned Renaissance man, living on an island that by his time, in the early seventeenth century, was home to a well-integrated society of Creto-Venetians and Greeks who, with self-awareness and not a little pride,

depicting this admittedly rare subject, and that the panel now in the Byzantine Museum in Athens is not the one formerly in the possession of Andrea Cornaro. The attribution of the icon in the Byzantine Museum of Athens to Andreas Ritzos has also been challenged by E. Zournatzis, "Pittura così ottima e perfetta": Aspects of the Pictorial Technique of Andreas Ritzos," in *Λαμπηδών: Αφιέρωμα στη μνήμη της Ντούλας Μουρίκη*, ed. M. Aspra-Vardavaki (Athens, 2003), 2:901–14, especially n. 5 on pp. 911–12.

recognized the idiosyncratic cultural identity of renaissance Crete.⁵ This shared identity extended to common religious practices, as becomes evident in Cornaro's equal distribution of endowments to Orthodox and Catholic churches and in his request that services for the relief of his soul and the remission of his sins be performed by priests of both rites.⁶

The picture that emerges from Cornaro's will is consistent with what we know from all aspects of cultural life from this period in Crete: theater, poetry, music, architecture, and painting all testify to the flourishing of the so-called Cretan renaissance of the sixteenth–seventeenth centuries.⁷ But the question I wish to raise and discuss in the present paper does not concern Cornaro's or Michael Damaskinos's and Domenicos Theotokopoulos's time, but is about the roots of this phenomenon. In other words, when can the first expressions of this shared cultural identity be identified in the Venetian colony of Crete and more

specifically, how is this process reflected in the religious painting produced on the island. The choice of this particular form of artistic expression as the focal point of this inquiry is not fortuitous, as religious painting and particularly icons were a highly esteemed local product that acquired international fame and an equally international clientele.⁸ Icons were Cretan artistic creations with an “appellation d'origine contrôlée,” attested by the numerous commissions mentioned in the sources and by a series of extant panels with the provenance “de Candia” added as a trademark next to the painter's signature (fig. 2).⁹

5 C. Maltezou, “The Historical and Social Context,” in *Literature and Society in Renaissance Crete*, ed. D. Holton (Cambridge, 1991), 17–47; M. Georgopoulou, *Venice's Mediterranean Colonies: Architecture and Urbanism* (Cambridge, 2001); S. Kaklamanis, “Η χαρτογραφηση του χώρου και των συνειδήσεων στην Κρήτη κατά την περίοδο της Βενετοκρατίας,” in *CANDIA/CRETA/KPHTH: Ο χώρος και ο χρόνος, 16^{ος}–18^{ος} αιώνας* (Athens, 2005), 11–69; Kaklamanis “Ειδήσεις”; Panayiotakis, “Ερευναι” (both n. 1 above). It is noteworthy that at least one branch of the Cornaro family was of mixed Venetian and Greek ancestry; see S. McKee, *Uncommon Dominion: Venetian Crete and the Myth of Ethnic Purity* (Philadelphia, 2000), 64–66.

6 Bequests to both Greek and Latin religious foundations, are attested in wills since the 14th century on Crete, as a result of intermarriages between members of the two communities; S. McKee, “Greek Women in Latin Households of Fourteenth-Century Venetian Crete,” *JMedHist* 19 (1993): 229–49. The phenomenon was probably reinforced by a shift in the ecclesiastical policy followed by the Venetian authorities in Crete toward more pro-Orthodox measures occurred in the late sixteenth century, after the loss of Cyprus to the Ottomans and during the fourth Veneto-Ottoman war, S. Karydis, “Οργάνωση της ορθόδοξης εκκλησίας,” in *Βενετοκρατούμενη Ελλάδα: Προσεγγίζοντας την ιστορία της*, ed. Ch. Maltezou, vol. 1 (Athens–Venice, 2010), 295–326; Kaklamanis, “Η χαρτογράφηση” (n. 5 above). On provisions for icons in wills from Venetian Crete, see A. Lymberopoulou, “Pro anima mea, but Do Not Touch My Icons: Provisions for Private Icons in Wills from Venetian-Dominated Crete,” in *The Kindness of Strangers: Charity in the Pre-Modern Mediterranean*, ed. D. Stathakopoulos (London, 2007), 71–89.

7 Holton, *Literature and Society*, passim and esp. “The Bibliographical Guide,” 275–300. See also the collection of studies in Vassis, Kaklamanis, and Loukaki, *Παιδεία και πολιτισμός* (n. 1 above).

8 From the extensive bibliography on Cretan icons, see the fundamental studies by M. Chatzidakis: “Les débuts de l' école crétoise et la question de l' école dite italogrecque,” in *Μνημόσυνον Σοφίας Αντωνιάδη* (Venice, 1974), 169–211 (reprinted in *Études sur la peinture postbyzantine* [London, 1976], IV); “Essai sur l' école dite ‘italoogrecque’ précédé d' une note sur les rapports de l' art venitien avec l' art crétoise jusqu' a 1500,” in *Venezia e il Levante fino al secolo XV*, vol. 2 (Florence, 1974), 69–124; *Icons of Patmos: Questions of Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Painting* (Athens, 1985); *Ἑλληνες ζωγράφοι μετά την Ἀλωση (1450–1830)*, vol. 1 (Athens, 1987), 73–92. Also, M. Kazanaki-Lappa, “Η ζωγραφική στην Κρήτη (1350–1669): Η βυζαντινή παράδοση και η σχέση με τη δυτική τέχνη,” *Cretan Studies* 6 (1998): 51–70; M. Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, “La pittura di icone a Creta veneziana (secoli XV e XVI): Questioni di Meccenatismo, Iconografia e preferenze estetiche,” in *Venezia e Creta: Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi, Iraklion-Chania, 30 settembre–5 ottobre 1997*, ed. G. Ortalli (Venice, 1998), 459–507. See the more recent contributions by D. Newall, “Candia and Post-Byzantine Icons in Late Fifteenth-Century Europe” and K. Woods, “Byzantine Icons in the Netherlands, Bohemia and Spain during the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries,” in *Byzantine Art and Renaissance Europe*, ed. A. Lymberopoulou and R. Duits (Farnham 2013), 101–34 and 135–55 respectively. See also the following exhibition catalogues: *Lart des icônes en Crète et dans les îles après Byzance*, ed. T. Chatzidakis, exhibition catalogue, Charleroi, Palais des Beaux Arts (Charleroi, 1982); *Icons of the Cretan School*, ed. N. Chatzidakis, exhibition catalogue, Athens, Benaki Museum (Athens, 1983); *From Byzantium to El Greco, Greek Frescoes and Icons*, ed. M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, exhibition catalogue, London, Royal Academy of Art (Athens, 1987); *Holy Image Holy Space: Icons and Frescoes from Greece*, ed. M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, exhibition catalogue, Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery et al. (Athens, 1988); *Εικόνες της Κρητικής τέχνης*, ed. M. Borboudakis, exhibition catalogue, Herakleion (Herakleion, 1993); *The Origins of El Greco: Icon Painting in Venetian Crete*, ed. A. Drandaki, exhibition catalogue, New York, the Onassis Cultural Center (New York, 2009); *The Hand of Angelos: An Icon Painter in Venetian Crete*, ed. M. Vassilaki, exhibition catalogue, Athens, Benaki Museum (Farnham and Athens, 2010).

9 A. Drandaki, “Between Byzantium and Venice: Icon Painting in Venetian Crete in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries,” in eadem, *Origins of El Greco*, 11–18, esp. 16, with earlier bibliography.



Fig. 2. Crucifixion, by Andreas Paviyas. Candia, ca. 1500. Athens, National Gallery–Alexandros Soutzos Museum, inv. no. 144 (Alexandros Soutzos bequest, 1901) (photo: National Gallery of Athens–Alexandros Soutzos Museum)

Therefore, for the purposes of this discussion I will go back to the early fifteenth century, when Cretan icon painting began to take on its distinctive characteristics. This was the period when, as we know from the Venetian archives, the flourishing urban society of Crete had already become a magnet for many artists and intellectuals from Constantinople, who relocated to Candia in search of a better living. In so doing they brought a breath of fresh air to Cretan artistic production, by infusing the local tradition with models, styles, and technical skills then current in the Byzantine capital.¹⁰ This paper will focus on two examples of Cretan painting from that period that are baffling, because they defy our well-ordered classification of works “a la latina” or “a la greca” (terms attested in the sources that are used liberally in scholarly writings).¹¹ The works discussed below are problematic, not least because their iconographic and stylistic traits, when examined closely, do not directly betray the religious convictions of the patron or the identity of their destined audience, and make nonsense of the notion of religious works made specifically for Catholic or Orthodox congregations.¹²

10 M. Cattapan, “Nuovi elenchi e documenti dei pittori in Creta dal 1300 al 1500,” *Θησαυρίσματα* 9 (1972): 202–35; M. Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, “Viaggi di pittori tra Costantinopoli e Candia: documenti d’archivio e influssi sull’arte (XIV–XV sec.),” in *I Greci durante la venetocrazia: Uomini, spazio, idee (XIII–XVIII sec.)*, *Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi (Venezia, 3–7 dicembre 2007)*, ed. C. Maltezou, A. Tzavara, and D. Vlassi (Venice, 2009), 709–23; Drandaki “Between Byzantium and Venice.”

11 A. Drandaki, “A Maniera Greca: Content, Context and Transformation of a Term,” *Studies in Iconography* 35 (2014): 39–72.

12 In modern literature it is often taken for granted that Cretan icons painted following Late Gothic models (a la latina) were destined for a Catholic clientele, while most of those following traditional Byzantine prototypes (a la greca) addressed the Orthodox faithful. Pertinent observations on this issue were made by M. Bacci, “Veneto-Byzantine ‘Hybrids’: Towards a Reassessment,” *Studies in Iconography* 35 (2014): 73–106 and O. Gratziou, “A La Latina: Ζωγράφοι εικόνων προσανατολισμένοι δυτικά,” *Δελτ. Χριστ. Αρχ. Ετ.* 33 (2012): 357–68. See also A. Lymberopoulou, “Audiences and Markets for Cretan Icons,” in *Viewing Renaissance Art*, ed. K. W. Woods, C. M. Richardson, and A. Lymberopoulou, vol. 3 (London, 2007), 171–206. Some of the panels discussed by Lymberopoulou are in fact works by Greek painters of different origin—e.g. Ioannis Permeniatas from Rhodes—who were also conversant with Italian art but developed a pictorial idiom different from their Cretan contemporaries. This interesting topic needs further investigation. On Permeniatas and his Rhodian origins: M. Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, “L’arte dei pittori Greci a Venezia nel Cinquecento,”

The first example I am going to use is a composite work, which is now dismantled and dispersed in various collections around the world. Its original form cannot be fully reconstructed with any certainty, but it was a polyptych, of which only two panels with bilateral, two-tier decoration on each side have been identified so far (fig. 3). In the 1960s, each panel was brutally, if skillfully, sliced vertically through the middle of the wooden support to create two very thin, separate panels, before being bisected horizontally, resulting in eight small icons that could be sold separately. Each measures about 25 × 18 cm (9.8 × 7 in.). Dr. Eva Haustein-Bartsch, the curator of the Icon Museum in Recklinghausen, which has housed one of the small icons since 1969, was the first to identify the history of the dismembered ensemble and locate four of its images.¹³ Aside from the icon in Recklinghausen, which features St. Luke painting the icon of the Virgin Hodegetria (fig. 3e), a Crucifixion was bought in 1964 by the National Museum in Stockholm (fig. 3c) and two more icons from the same set, with pairs of military saints and prophets, has belonged since 1993 to the Marianna Latsis Collection in Athens (fig. 3f, 3h).¹⁴ The other four icons from the group found their way into private collections, and their exact whereabouts remained unknown until 2013–14, when they were acquired, restored and put on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. They depict the Baptism (fig. 3a), the Descent into Hell (3b), Saint Nicholas enthroned with two scenes from his life (3d), and St. John the Evangelist dictating to Prochoros (3g).¹⁵

in *La pittura nel Veneto: Il Cinquecento*, ed. M. Lucco (Milan, 1999), esp. 573, n. 21; K. Kefala, “Σχετικά με ένα πιθανό έργο του ζωγράφου Ιωάννη Περμενιάτη στην Πάτμο,” *Δελτ. Χριστ. Αρχ. Ετ.* 37 (2016): 137–55, with earlier bibliography.

13 E. Haustein-Bartsch, “Lukas malt die Gottesmutter” in *Ikonen-Museum Recklinghausen*, in *Greek Icons: Proceedings of the Symposium in Memory of Manolis Chatzidakis in Recklinghausen, 1998* (Athens and Recklinghausen, 2000), 11–28.

14 Ibid.; M. Kazanaki-Lappa, “Two Fifteenth-Century Icons in a Private Collection,” in *Greek Icons*, 29–38; Vassilaki, *Hand of Angelos* (above, n. 8), nos. 10–13, entries by U. Abel, E. Haustein-Bartsch, and M. Kazanaki-Lappa.

15 I am most indebted to Dr. Helen Evans, Mary and Michael Jaharis Curator of Byzantine Art at the Metropolitan Museum, for inviting me to examine the four icons and for giving me access to wonderful photographic material that allowed me to study them in detail. For the new acquisition see: <http://www.metmuseum.org/art/online-features/metcollects/byzantine-icons> (accessed 1 June 2017).



Fig. 3. Eight panels from a dismantled polyptych. Candia, early fifteenth century. a, b, d, g: New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Mary and Michael Jaharis Gift, inv. no. 2013.980a–d; c: Stockholm, National Museum, inv. no. NMI 292; e: Recklinghausen, Ikonen-Museum, inv. no. 424; f, h: Athens, Private Collection (photos: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; National Museum of Stockholm; Ikonen-Museum Recklinghausen)

In their respective studies on the St. Luke and the Latsis paired saints Eva Hausteин-Bartsch and Maria Kazanaki-Lappa were in agreement on the group's dating and attribution.¹⁶ They both argued persuasively that the ensemble to which these images originally belonged was an early fifteenth-century Cretan work produced in a highly skilled workshop that showed a mastery of contemporary late Palaiologan trends, while being at the same time aware of the International Gothic style, especially in its Venetian manifestations. Indeed, the surviving parts of this polyptych display an erudite mix of both traditions that reveals not only the workshop's artistic bilingualism but above all the

patron's interests and sensibilities. Two of the narrative images, the Baptism of Christ and the Descent into Hell, represent the latest developments in Palaiologan painting, displaying a penchant for crowded scenes with an array of subsidiary episodes taking place around the central holy event, as in the case of the Baptism of Christ, or for collapsing successive episodes into a single complex narrative, as we see in the Descent into Hell, where two events with the Maries at the Tomb have been added to the foreground.¹⁷ Both images faithfully reproduce Byzantine models dating from the middle

16 Hausteин-Bartsch, "Lukas malt" and Kazanaki-Lappa, "Two Fifteenth-Century Icons."

17 T. Gouma-Peterson, "A Byzantine 'Anastasis' Icon in the Walters Art Gallery," *JWalt* 42–43 (1984–85): 48–60; M. Aspravadavaki and M. Emmanuel, *Η Μονή της Παντάνασσας στον Μυστρά: Οι τοιχογραφίες του 15^{ου} αιώνα* (Athens, 2005), 257–309.



Fig. 4. Left: Anastasis from the Cretan polyptych (fig. 3b), New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 2013.980c; right: Anastasis, second half of the fourteenth century. Baltimore, Walters Art Museum, no. 37.751 (photos: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Walters Art Museum, Baltimore)

or second half of the fourteenth century, like the icon with the Descent into Hell in the Walters Art Museum (fig. 4) or the Baptism scene from the Peribleptos church in Mistra and more particularly an icon of the mid-fourteenth century with the Baptism, in the National Museum in Belgrade, whose iconography is identical to the one on the Cretan polyptych down to the last detail (fig. 5).¹⁸ By contrast, the third narrative

scene in the group, the Crucifixion, is a purely Italian painting, remaining faithful to its models not only in every iconographic detail, but also in the rendering of the insubstantial, ethereal figures with their soft-fold draperies, their individual facial features, and a palette that is in striking contrast to the more sober color range applied to the Byzantine scenes of the same ensemble (fig. 6).¹⁹ Interestingly, this Duccoesque Crucifixion

18 For the Descent into Hell in the Walters Art Museum, Gouma-Peterson, "Byzantine 'Anastasis' Icon" (n. 17 above); a comparable complex composition, with subsidiary episodes on the lower part of the panel, is found in an early fifteenth-century Crucifixion in the Museum of Kremlin, *Bizantiya, Balkany, Rus, ikony kontsa XIII–pervoi poloviny XV beka*, exhibition catalogue (Moscow, 1991), 255–56, no. 97, entry by E. Ostasenko. For the Baptism in Belgrade, M. Tatić-Djurić, "Le Baptême de Jesus-Christ, icône datant de l'époque de la renaissance des Paléologues," *ZbNarodMus* 4 (1964): 267–81 (in Serbian with French summary). For the analogous scenes in the

Peribleptos and the Pantanassa in Mistra, G. Millet, *Monuments byzantins de Mistra* (Paris, 1910), pl. 118.3; M. Chatzidakis, *Mystras: The Medieval City and the Castle; A Complete Guide to the Churches, Palaces and the Castle* (Athens, 1981), fig. 50; Aspra-Vardavaki and Emmanuel, *H Movή της Παντάνασσας*, 107–12.

19 See particularly the Crucifixions painted by Duccio and his followers: J. White, *Duccio: Tuscan Art and the Medieval Workshop* (London, 1979), 153–57; *Duccio alle origini della pittura senese*, ed. A. Bagnoli et al., exhibition catalogue, Siena, Santa Maria della Scala–Museo dell'Opera del Duomo (Milan, 2003), nos. 32, 41, esp. fig. on



Fig. 5. Left: Baptism from the Cretan polyptych (fig. 3a), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. no. 2013.980b; right: Baptism, mid-fourteenth century, Belgrade, National Museum, inv. no. 4348 (photos: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; National Museum of Belgrade)

has no inscription, nor could I discern anywhere on its gold ground the incised pair of parallel lines that guided the hand of the painter in the well-written, literate inscriptions that we see in profusion on the other images of the group. As is well known, inscriptions identifying scenes and holy persons became an integral part of Byzantine iconography after iconoclasm, while their presence in religious works destined for a Latin audience is rather arbitrary.²⁰

p. 295 depicting the Crucifixion in the Manchester City Gallery, nos. 50 and 63, essays by G. Ragioneri, R. Bartolini, A. Bagnoli, and L. Bellosi.

20 H. Maguire, *The Icon of Their Bodies: Saints and Their Images in Byzantium* (Princeton, 1999), 100–45; on the same topic from a different angle, see idem, “Eufrasius and Friends: On Names and Their Absence in Byzantine Art,” in *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture*, ed. L. James (New York, 2007), 139–60 and more recently A. Weyl Carr, “Labelling Images, Venerating Icons in Sylvester Syropoulos’s World,” in *Sylvester Syropoulos on Politics and Culture*

Despite the obvious differences in models and manner of execution, a close examination of these three narrative scenes reveals a similar handling of human figures with elongated, weightless bodies and small heads with expressive features, the type of human figure that dominates Byzantine painting of the mid- to late fourteenth century, such as the stavrotheke of Bessarion but also Venetian Late Gothic paintings like those by Paolo Veneziano.²¹ Also, in all three images from the

in the *Fifteenth-Century Mediterranean: Themes and Problems in the Memoirs, Section IV*, ed. F. Kondyli, V. Andriopoulou, and E. Panou (Farnham, 2014), 79–106.

21 R. Polacco, “La stavrotheke del cardinal Bessarione,” in *Bessarione e l’Umanesimo*, exhibition catalogue, ed. G. Fiaccadori et al., Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana (Venice, 1994), 369–78 and *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557)*, exhibition catalogue, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, 2004), 540–41, no. 325 (M. Georgopoulou), with earlier bibliography; M. Muraro, *Paolo da Venezia* (University Park and London, 1970), passim.

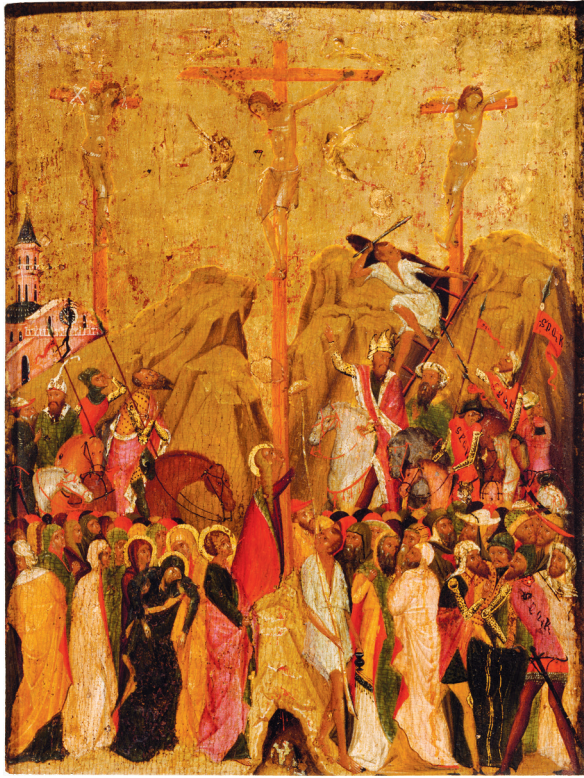


Fig. 6. Left: Crucifixion from the Cretan polyptych (fig. 3c), Stockholm, National Museum, inv. no. NMI 292; right: Crucifixion by Emmanuel Lambardos, Crete, late sixteenth–early seventeenth century. Saint Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum, inv. no. I-44 (photos: National Museum of Stockholm; State Hermitage Museum)

polyptych the artist has made use of identical painterly methods, e.g., barely visible contours and the use of thin, translucent layers of paint that accentuate the immateriality of the figures (fig. 7). Despite their using a variety of models, the three scenes should probably be attributed to a single painter capable of successfully employing diverse painterly modes drawn from the versatile repertoire that Byzantine and Venetian patrons and artists shared alike. In this respect it is worth remembering that the Cretan polyptych is not an isolated case, nor is the much-discussed artistic diglossia of the Cretan icon workshops a new phenomenon that emerged for the first time or solely on Venetian Crete.²² Suffice it to mention

here a well-known icon of the Virgin of Tenderness at the Benaki Museum, dating to about fifty years earlier, in the mid-fourteenth century, that provides a good antecedent for the Cretan work (fig. 8). On the Benaki icon, the central representation of the Virgin and Child exemplifies a balanced mixture of late Byzantine and Venetian iconographic features and is surrounded by an elaborate wooden frame decorated with a rare combination of traditional Byzantine Christological scenes fashioned in colored gesso in imitation of steatite carvings, with two apostles' busts executed in verre églomisé, according to a technique applied by Venetian glass workshops of the fourteenth century.²³ Icons like

22 On the roots of this phenomenon in late Byzantine art, see A. Drandaki, *Greek Icons 14th–18th Century: The Rena Andreadis Collection* (Athens and Milan, 2002), 24–35 and “Between Byzantium and Venice” (n. 9 above); R. Cormack, “The Icon in Constantinople around 1400,” in Vassilaki, *Hand of Angelos* (n. 8 above), 48–57. Specifically on Crete, see also M. Vassilakis-Mavrakakis, “Western Influences on the 14th Century Art of Crete,” *XVI*.

Internationaler Byzantinistenkongress, Wien, 4.–9. Oktober 1981. Akten, vol. 2.5 = *JÖB* 32, no. 5 (1982): 301–311 and S. Papadaki-Oekland, “Δυτικότερες τοιχογραφίες του 14^{ου} αιώνα στην Κρήτη: Η άλλη όψη μιας αμφίδρομης σχέσης,” in *Ευφρόσυνον: Αφιέρωμα στον Μανόλη Χατζηδάκη*, vol. 2 (Athens, 1992), 491–514.

23 M. Vassilaki, “Εικόνα της Παναγίας Γλυκοφιλούσας του Μουσείου Μπενάκη (αρ. ευρ. 2972): Προβλήματα της έρευνας,” K. Milanou,

Fig. 7.
Details from the
Crucifixion
(fig. 3c) and the
Baptism (fig. 3a)
from the Cretan
polyptych





Fig. 8.
The Virgin of Tenderness,
Venice or Constantinople (?)
mid-fourteenth century.
Athens, Benaki Museum,
inv. no. 2972 (photo:
Benaki Museum)

the Benaki Virgin of Tenderness, which could appeal equally to the tastes of a Westernized Byzantine patron

or a Venetian one who had been exposed to and was appreciative of Byzantine or Byzantinizing works of art,²⁴ reveal that styles, techniques, and iconographic

²⁴ “Εικόνα της Παναγίας Γλυκοφιλούσας του Μουσείου Μπενάκη (αρ. ευρ. 2972): Τεχνική ανάλυση”; and D. Gordon, “The Icon of the Virgin Glykophilousa in the Benaki Museum, Athens (inv. no. 2972): The verres églomisés,” all three in *Byzantine Icons: Art, Technique and Technology; An International Symposium, Gennadius Library—The American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 20–21 February 1998*, ed. M. Vassilaki (Heraklion, 2002), 201–10, 219–29, and 211–18; Drandaki, Papanikola-Bakirtzi, and Tourta, *Heaven and Earth* (n. 2 above), 318–19, no. 167, by M. Vassilaki, with earlier bibliography.

24 On the Westernized Byzantine aristocracy A. E. Laiou, “The Byzantine Aristocracy in the Palaeologan Period: A Story of Arrested Development,” *Viator* 4 (1973): 131–51 (reprinted in A. E. Laiou, *Gender, Society and Economic Life in Byzantium* [Hampshire, 1992]); A. Kiousopoulou, *Emperor or Manager: Power and Political Ideology in Byzantium before 1453*, trans. P. Magdalino (Geneva, 2011); A. E. Laiou, “Before the Fall: Political and Economic Conditions in Constantinople in the Fifteenth Century,” in Vassilaki, *Hand*

solutions of diverse origin coexisted in a variety of combinations and could meet the needs of patrons with different ethnic or religious affiliations.²⁵ In the case of the Cretan polyptych under examination, as with every other composite work of art whose original context is lost to us, the key question is how we may reconstruct the historic circumstances and particular needs that dictated the commissioner's selective choice of models for the creation of a hybrid ensemble.²⁶

Just as revealing as the polyptych's narrative scenes are the five images with portraits of the evangelists and pairs of saints, which are dependent on a variety of models, both Byzantine and Late Gothic, for their rendering of the human figure and secondary elements. Once again, as was the case with the narrative scenes, each image remains true to its model not only in iconography and style but also in palette. Yet despite their multifarious sources, the portraits retain a homogeneity that allows them to function as a coherent group of holy figures, mainly because they all share the same gentle, contemplative faces and elegant movements. The most distinctive figure among them is the seated Saint Nicholas, whose serene, saintly Byzantine face is combined with the materiality of a body with surprising physical presence, clad in draperies with soft,

naturalistic folds (fig. 9). The two diminutive miracle scenes next to his head are treated in the same manner as the multi-figured scenes from the life of Christ.

What could be the purpose of such a polyptych? How can we reconstruct its original layout with any measure of certainty from this fragmentary assortment of Christological scenes and portraits of holy figures? The old black-and-white photographs Eva Haustein located and published offer some indication but, as they were taken after the dismantling of the panels, they cannot be relied upon.²⁷ The same combination of Christological scenes with evangelists and saints, sometimes in pairs, is encountered in some fourteenth-century composite works with a similar two-tiered layout. It is noteworthy that such works, with the same organization of the paint surface, occur both in Italy and north of the Alps and in the Byzantine world, where they function as altarpieces and polyptychs respectively.²⁸ Most characteristic among them are the famous and influential *Maestà* by Duccio in Sienna and the altarpiece by Master Bertram in Hamburg,²⁹ while from Byzantium there are two splendid fourteenth-century examples, a tetrptych and an hexaptych, both kept in Saint Catherine's Monastery at Sinai

of *Angelos* (n. 8 above), 16–25. More generally on the interaction between Byzantines and Latins in the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, see *Latins and Greeks in the Eastern Mediterranean after 1204*, ed. B. Arbel, B. Hamilton, and D. Jacoby (London and New York, 1989); *Byzantines, Latins, and Turks in the Eastern Mediterranean World after 1250*, ed. J. Harris, C. Holmes, and E. Russell (New York, 2012), particularly the contributions by C. Holmes ("Introduction" and "Shared Worlds': Religious Identities—A Question of Evidence," 1–59) and J. Ryder ("Byzantium and the West in the 1360s: The Kydones Version," 345–66). On the special relation between Venice and Byzantium, see D. M. Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice: A Study in Diplomatic and Cultural Relations* (Cambridge, 1992); *San Marco, Byzantium, and the Myths of Venice*, ed. H. Maguire and R. S. Nelson (Washington, DC, 2010); and for correlations between Byzantine and Venetian painting in the later fifteenth century, R. Goffen, "Icon and Vision: Giovanni Bellini's Half-Length Madonnas" *Art Bulletin* 57, no. 4 (Dec. 1975): 487–518.

25 Drandaki, "A Maniera" (n. 11 above), with earlier bibliography.

26 On the problems involved in using the terms *hybrid* and *hybridity* for works of art and archaeology, see H. Bhabha, "Cultures 'in-between,'" in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. S. Hall, S. du Gay, and P. du Gay (London, 1996), 53–60; J. Card, "Introduction," in *The Archaeology of Hybrid Material Culture*, ed. J. Card (Carbondale, 2013), 1–22; S. W. Silliman, "What, Where and When Is Hybridity?," *ibid.*, 486–500.

27 Haustein-Bartsch, "Lukas malt" (n. 13 above), figs. 22–23.

28 The exact use of such polyptychs in a Byzantine context has not been fully explored. The two ensembles in Sinai mentioned below, which when unfolded measure about 36 × 110 cm (the tetrptych), and 31 × 83 cm (the exaptych), could be used either for private devotion or for church services in any of the unadorned chapels in or around the monastic complex at Sinai: *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground: Icons from Sinai*, ed. R. S. Nelson and K. M. Collins, exhibition catalogue, The J. P. Getty Museum, Los Angeles (Los Angeles, 2006), 163. However, the use of such polyptychs would not have been restricted to a monastic environment. Since the decoration of such composite works incorporates extended feast cycles and portraits of saints, they could easily substitute for a complete iconographical cycle in any devotional space. Furthermore, if combined with an antimensium they could create a fully functional, consecrated cult space.

29 On the reverse of Duccio's *Maestà* and the function of such two-tiered painting ensembles, see P. Seiler, "Duccio's *Maestà*: The Function of the Scenes from the Life of Christ on the Reverse of the Altarpiece: A New Hypothesis" and K. van der Ploeg, "How Liturgical Is a Medieval Altarpiece?," both in *Italian Panel Painting of the Duecento and Trecento*, ed. V. M. Schmidt (New Haven and London, 2002), 251–69 and 103–21; on Master Bertram's altarpiece for the main altar of Sankt Petri, Hamburg, S. Kaspersen, "Der St. Petri-Altar zu Hamburg: Eine Analyse des heilsgeschichtlichen Zyklus Meister Bertrams," in *Verein für katholische Kirchengeschichte in Hamburg und Schleswig-Holstein e.V. Beiträge und Mitteilungen* (Husum, 1993), 7–78.



Fig. 9.
St. Nicholas enthroned with
two scenes from his life from
the Cretan polyptych
(fig. 3d). New York,
The Metropolitan Museum
of Art, inv. no. 2013.980d
(photo: Metropolitan
Museum of Art)

(fig. 10).³⁰ Although we cannot be certain if our two-tiered Cretan panels were arranged around a large central panel (perhaps with a Virgin and Child) or simply formed a continuous narrative without a devotional focal point like the Sinai examples or the altarpiece by Master Bertram, I think we may surmise that the

original form of the ensemble is unlikely to have been very different from these fourteenth-century works. At the same time, the scale of the representations and the miniaturist character of the scenes point toward an object intended for private devotion, as each image invites the viewer to study it closely so as to decipher the subsidiary episodes and read the minuscule but perfectly legible inscriptions.

But if the layout of the polyptych can easily be matched with a familiar type of composite work fashionable at the time, determining the reasons for the

30 *Byzantium: Faith and Power* (n. 21 above), 370–72; no. 227 (E. Bakalova); Nelson and Collins, *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground*, 162–65. On their comparison with the Cretan polyptych under examination, Hausteint-Bartsch, “Lukas malt” (n. 13 above).



Fig. 10. Tetraptych with feast scenes and saints, fourteenth century. Sinai, Monastery of Saint Catherine (photo: Saint Catherine's Monastery, Sinai)

patron's selection of such mixed models for the individual images, a choice that looks at once idiosyncratic and very specific, is much more challenging. I think that the explanation of the patron's choice of models can be found in Cretan icon painting itself. The particular images found on this polyptych—with minor or barely discernible variations—recur again and again in Cretan icons over the next two centuries. No doubt, their proliferation was aided by the widespread use of working drawings and pricked cartoons, a practice well attested in Cretan icon painting from the fifteenth century onward.³¹ However, regardless of the

31 M. Vassilaki, *Από τους εικονογραφικούς οδηγούς στα σχέδια εργασίας των μεταβυζαντινών ζωγράφων: Το τεχνολογικό υπόβαθρο της βυζαντινής εικονογραφίας* (Athens, 1995), esp. 31–40 and more recently eadem, *Working Drawings of Icon Painters after the Fall of Constantinople: The Andreas Xyngopoulos Portfolio at the Benaki Museum* (Athens, 2015), esp. 23–31. Of particular interest is the will of the Candiot painter Angelos Akotantos, according to which he bequeathed his *teseniasmata* and *skiasmata* (designs and drawings)

process followed by the painters to reproduce various iconographic themes, it is the choice of specific images and the reasons behind these choices that are of particular interest here. Scenes like the Anastasis or the elegant standing figure of Saint George slaying a pink Gothic dragon were to become parts of the standard repertoire of Cretan painters (fig. 11).³² The image of

to his brother Ioannis, also a painter: M. Kazanaki-Lappa, "The Will of Angelos Akotantos," in Vassilaki, *Hand of Angelos* (n. 8 above), 104–10.

32 Regarding the Anastasis or Descent into Hell see an icon of the mid-century at the Benaki Museum (inv. no. 3718), *A Mystery Great and Wondrous*, ed. D. Konstantios, exhibition catalogue, Athens, Byzantine and Christian Museum (Athens, 2001), 388–89, entry by A. Drandaki, and a somewhat later panel with almost identical iconography in the Hellenic Institute in Venice, M. Chatzidakis, *Icons de Saint Georges des Grecs et de la Collection de l'Institut* (Venice, 1962), no. 11, pl. IV. These two icons, along with all known later examples, repeat only the main scene of the Anastasis, omitting the subsidiary episodes with the Maries at the Tomb. For close parallels of the Gothicizing St. George slaying the dragon see particularly an



St. John dictating to Prochoros in front of the cave of the Apocalypse, though known from many Palaiologan depictions located in different parts of the Byzantine world,³³ is encountered in this particular form only in works made in Crete from the early fifteenth to the seventeenth century (fig. 12).³⁴ Even more striking

icon of the late fifteenth century in the Benaki Museum: Kazanaki-Lappa "Two Fifteenth-Century Icons" (n. 14 above), 33–34 and esp. n. 25, with further examples.

33 N. P. Ševčenko, "The Cave of the Apocalypse" in *Διεθνές Συμπόσιο: Πρακτικά*, vol. 1, *Μονή Αγ. Ιωάννου του Θεολόγου: 900 χρόνια ιστορικής μαρτυρίας (1088–1988)*, Patmos, 22–24 September 1988 (Athens, 1989), 169–78.

34 The representation of St. John dictating to Prochoros in front of the cave of the Apocalypse was directly related to the Monastery of St. John the Theologian in Patmos, which retained very close ties with Crete. The scene was among the most popular in the repertoire of Cretan painters. Representative examples include the miniature in the manuscript with the Commentary on the Apocalypse by Federico de Renoldo, made in Candia in 1415, now in the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore (no. W.335, fol. 31r); D. Pallas, "Οι βενετοκρητικές μικρογραφίες Olschki 35398 του έτους 1415," *Πεπραγμένα Β' Διεθνούς Κρητολογικού Συνεδρίου*, vol. 1 (Athens, 1967), 362–73; H. Belting, *Das illuminierte Buch*

are the enthroned St. Nicholas and the Late Gothic Crucifixion, images so distinctive that their systematic repetition on Cretan works of art can hardly be accidental. The St. Nicholas appears in identical form on a monumental, late fifteenth-century Cretan icon in the Martorana, commissioned by a Greek confraternity.³⁵ Slightly later an identical St. Nicholas becomes the central part of a vita icon, on which the

in der späbyzantinischen Gesellschaft (Heidelberg, 1970), 70–71; M. Vassilaki, "Some Observations on Early Fifteenth-Century Painting in Crete," in *The Painter Angelos and Icon-Painting in Venetian Crete* (Farnham, 2009), 203–24, esp. 210–14. An icon by Angelos in Sinai: N. B. Drandakis, "Post-Byzantine Icons (Cretan School)," in *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery of Saint Catherine*, ed. K. Manafis (Athens, 1990), 127, fig. 80; Vassilaki, *Hand of Angelos* (n. 8 above), 182–83, no. 40, entry by M. Vassilaki. An icon signed by Emmanuel Lambardos (1602), in the Hellenic Institute of Venice: Chatzidakis, *Icons*, 84–85, no. 55; Vassilaki, *Hand of Angelos*, 224–25, no. 60, entry by M. Kazanaki-Lappa.

35 P. L. Vocotopoulos, "La scuola iconografica cretese e le iconi dell'Eparchia di Piana degli Albanesi," *Oriente Cristiano* 27, nos. 2–3 (1987): 42–57, esp. 51. J. Lindsay-Opie, "The Siculo-Cretan School of Icon Painting," in *Ευφρόσυνον: Αφιέρωμα στον Μανόλη Χατζηδάκη*, vol. 1 (Athens, 1991), 297–308, esp. 299 and fig. 144.

Fig. 11.
St. George slaying
the Dragon. Crete,
late fifteenth
century. Athens,
Benaki Museum, inv.
no. 3737 (photo:
Benaki Museum)



contrast between the Gothicizing main figure and the traditional Byzantine scenes from his life is particularly striking (fig. 13).³⁶ Interestingly, the two scenes that accompany the St. Nicholas on our polyptych are identical to the same scenes from this later vita icon. In fact I think it highly probable that the St. Nicholas of the polyptych repeats in condensed form an earlier,

fourteenth-century vita icon. This model's resistance to time is evidenced by its recurrence in two more icons from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The first is another vita icon, attributed to Georgios Klontzas (second half of the sixteenth century) while the other is an interesting panel of 1642 from the Toplou Monastery in eastern Crete, on which two of the most venerated Cretan images are crammed onto a single panel: the Virgin of the Passion and the enthroned St. Nicholas

36 Drandaki, *Greek Icons* (n. 22 above), 52–59.



Fig. 12. Left: Icon with St. John dictating to Prochoros from the Cretan polyptych (fig. 3g); right: miniature with St. John dictating to Prochoros. Candia, 1415. Baltimore, Walters Art Museum, no. W335, fol. 3r (photos: Metropolitan Museum of Art; Walters Art Museum)

rendered in the familiar Gothicizing iconography.³⁷ As for the Duccioesque Crucifixion on the polyptych, its iconography, manner, and color range are repeated in subsequent monumental commissions, like the wall painting in the exonarthex of the Saint Phanourios Monastery in Valsamonero (mid-fifteenth century) and the icons signed by Andreas Paviar (ca. 1500), in the National Gallery of Athens, and by Emmanuel

Lambardos a century later, now in the State Hermitage Museum (figs. 2 and 6).³⁸

The faithful repetition of these images in a series of ambitious commissions that were assigned to Cretan workshops for over two hundred years suggests that they were copying highly venerated local prototypes, probably displayed in Candia, where the major cult centers of the island—especially as far as the Venetian

37 On the icon attributed to Klontzas, N. Chatzidakis, "Εικόνα του αγίου Νικολάου με βιογραφικές σκηνές: Ένα άγνωστο έργο του Γεωργίου Κλοντζα," *Δελτ. Χριστ. Αρχ. Ετ.* 22 (2001): 393–416; on the icon from Toplou, Borboudakis, *Εικόνες της Κρητικής τέχνης* (n. 8 above), 499, no. 143, entry by M. Borboudakis. For an overview of St. Nicholas's depictions in Greek painting of the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, see M. Vassilaki, "San Nicola nella pittura di icone postbizantina," in *San Nicola: Splendori d'arte d'Oriente e d'Occidente*, ed. M. Bacci, exhibition catalogue, Bari, Castello Svevo (Milan, 2006), 71–76.

38 On the Crucifixion in the exonarthex of Valsamonero, see U. Ritzerfeld, "Bildpropaganda im Zeichen des Konzils von Florenz: Unionistische Bildmotive im Kloster Balsamonero auf Kreta," *OCP* 80, no. 2 (2014): 387–407, fig. 4; on the icon by Andreas Paviar, Drandaki, *Origins of El Greco* (n. 8 above), 64–65, no. 17, entry by M. Kazanaki-Lappa and Drandaki, Papanikola-Bakirtzi, and Tourta, *Heaven and Earth* (n. 2 above), 324–25, no. 172, entry by M. Katsanaki; on the Emmanuel Lambardos Crucifixion, *Sinai-Byzantium-Russia*, ed. O. Baddeley, E. Brunner, and M. Mundell Mango, exhibition catalogue, The State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg and The Courtauld Galleries, London (London, 2000), 184–85, no. B164, entry by Y. Piatnitsky.



Fig. 13. Vita icon of St. Nicholas, Crete, circa 1500. Athens, Rena Andreadis Collection, on long-term loan to the Benaki Museum (photo: Benaki Museum)

overlords were concerned—as well as all the workshops I mentioned above were located. Information gleaned from notarial documents corroborates this notion. For example, in 1634, when Piero Bon commissioned from the Candiot painter Stavrakis Dafotti the gilding and enameling of the Bon family altarpiece in St. Peter's church, the painter had to use as model an altarpiece dedicated to St. Mark, located in the cathedral church of St. Titos.³⁹ Unfortunately, as is well known, scarcely anything by way of painting has been preserved in situ in the Cretan towns.⁴⁰ The wall paintings, altarpieces, banners, and devotional works in the most important shrines, which would undoubtedly have served as models for the commissions undertaken by Cretan painters—in other words, what the official art of the island looked like—cannot be reconstructed except indirectly, through the afterlife of such works in the numerous reproductions that were commissioned from local icon workshops in the following centuries.⁴¹ As far as the polyptych under examination is concerned,

39 M. Kazanaki-Lappa, "Οι ζωγράφοι του Χάνδακα κατά το 17^ο αιώνα: Ειδήσεις από νοταριακά έγγραφα," *Θησαυρίσματα* 18 (1981): 177–267, esp. 181, 259–61.

40 The problem is discussed by O. Gratziou, "Venetian Monuments in Crete: A Controversial Heritage," in *A Singular Antiquity: Archaeology and Hellenic Identity in Twentieth-Century Greece*, ed. D. Damaskos and D. Plantzos (Athens, 2008), 209–22 [= *Museio Benaki*, 3rd Supplement] and idem, "Cretan Architecture and Sculpture in the Venetian Period," in Drandaki, *Origins of El Greco*, 19–27.

41 We have to assume—despite the continuous communication between Crete and Italy, and Venice in particular—that icon workshops operating in Candia and other towns on the island would not have been exposed to a wide variety of Italian or other western European art works except for those locally available, found in churches and private residences on the island. This is clearly reflected in the surviving fifteenth-century Cretan icons painted according to western models, which despite their significant numbers, reproduce only a handful of venerable prototypes. The situation changed dramatically in the course of the sixteenth century, when the dissemination of engravings offered painters access to a wide variety of iconographical models of diverse provenance. N. B. Drandakis, *Ο Εμμανουήλ Τζάνε Μπουνιαλής, θεωρούμενος εξ εικόνων του σωζομένου κυρίως εν Βενετία* (Athens, 1962), 152–70; I. Rigopoulos, *Ο αγιογράφος Θεόδωρος Πουλάνης και η Φλαμανδική χαλκογραφία* (Athens, 1979). See particularly the studies by M. Constantoudaki-Kitromilides: "Μιχαήλ Δαμασκηνός (1530/35–1592/93): Συμβολή στη μελέτη της ζωγραφικής του" (PhD diss., University of Athens, 1988), 73–81 and 158–285; "Ο Θεοφάνης, ο Marcantonio Raimondi, θέματα all'antica και grottesche," *Ευφρόσυνον: Αφιέρωμα στον Μανόλη Χατζηδάκη*, vol. 1 (Athens, 1991), 271–81 and "La pittura di icone a Creta veneziana" (n. 8 above).

this line of thought—i.e., that high-profile prototypes had inspired these images—is further supported by the fact that all the images on the polyptych, regardless of iconography and style, are dependent on earlier models that had become established in Italian and Byzantine painting by the late fourteenth century.

If my interpretation is correct, then in the early fifteenth century the person who commissioned this polyptych chose to create a composite devotional work by carefully bringing together some images that were highly venerated on the island which, as their iconography and style reveal, were of mixed Greek Orthodox and Venetian Catholic origin. The implications of this eclectic combination of images of varying religious pedigrees being brought together in a unified ensemble are manifold. As both Maria Kazanaki-Lappa and Eva Haustein-Bartsch have pointed out, the polyptych offers an early example of the Cretan painters' profound familiarity with both the Byzantine and the Italian artistic traditions, and reveals their well-grounded understanding of the iconography and style of both forms of painting.⁴² Even more importantly though from the patron's point of view, this polyptych suggests that by the early fifteenth century in Crete icons housed in religious foundations of both rites formed an integrated devotional nexus that could answer the needs, satisfy the tastes, and engage the sensibilities of the multiethnic and religiously mixed society of the island. And they created a common source of devotional models from which patrons and painters could draw at will.

The second example I intend to use is not a painted work as such. It is a theological construct and its pictorial expression in a group of commissions with programmatic aims and a consistent style, for which, unlike with the polyptych, we know the inspiration, the provenance, the date, and the artists concerned. Thus it is an ideal platform for examining the intentions behind the carefully constructed mixed style which characterizes them and the methods used in applying it. I refer to the cult of St. Phanourios, the church which was built and painted to be the focus of his cult in Valsamonero in Crete, and the contemporary icons commissioned to support the cult.

The cult of St. Phanourios, as Maria Vassilaki has documented, emerged in Crete in the first half of the

42 Haustein-Bartsch and Kazanaki-Lappa (nn. 13 and 14 above).

fifteenth century, inspired and promoted by the learned and enterprising abbot of the Valsamonero Monastery, Ionas Palamas.⁴³ A Life was composed around this hitherto unknown saint, complete with miracles and accounts of his amazing powers of intercession; a chapel was built, which functioned as a cult center and shrine; and a facial type and corresponding iconographical cycle developed, which were depicted in the wall paintings decorating the chapel and on devotional icons.⁴⁴

Sadly the Valsamonero complex remains unpublished.⁴⁵ However, the evidence on hand is enough to formulate some interesting observations. The monastery, originally dedicated to the Virgin, underwent a series of extensions in the first half of the fifteenth century, which do not appear to have been made according to any prior plan, but which were rather modifications or adjustments made in response to the fluctuating

political and religious conditions of the time (fig. 14). The architectural phases of the complex have been studied and interpreted by Olga Gratziou in her recent book on church architecture in Crete in the late Middle Ages.⁴⁶ The late Manolis Borboudakis, basing himself on the inscriptions in the monument, clarified the dating of the extensions and their subsequent decoration with wall paintings.⁴⁷ In 1407, to the south of the single-aisled church of the Virgin, a smaller aisle was added and dedicated to St. John the Baptist. The two aisles maintained their liturgical independence. That is, their sanctuaries, which do not communicate with each other, were designed to serve separate liturgies, possibly for congregations from the two rites, Catholics and Orthodox, which, Gratziou proposes, was probably the case for the majority of two-aisled, double-naved churches in Crete.⁴⁸

A little later in 1426, under the abbacy of Ionas Palamas, a single (unified) narthex was added, which was made into the chapel of St. Phanourios and after 1431 a second narthex was added. All the various parts of the monastery church have wall paintings, created in consecutive phases and with dated inscriptions. Their publication is crucially important to our understanding of Cretan religious painting in this vital first half of the fifteenth century. But all that interests us here is the narthex of 1426, which Ionas Palamas built and dedicated to the newly introduced St. Phanourios.

Phanourios's Life is directly related to the politico-religious conditions prevailing on Venetian Crete. The earliest surviving manuscript with his Life was written in 1542 by the scribe priest Ioannis Kodominos for the Latin Bishop of Sitia in eastern Crete, Georgios Avramiaios.⁴⁹ According to the text, four Cretan priests traveled to Venetian-held Coron to be ordained, according to the rules of the Venetian

43 M. Vassilakes-Mavrakakes, "Saint Phanourios: Cult and Iconography," *Δελτ. Χρ. Αρχ. Ετ.* 10 (1980–81): 223–38, repr. in Vassilaki, *Painter Angelos* (n. 34 above), 81–110; M. Vassilaki-Mavrakaki, "Ο ζωγράφος Άγγελος Ακοτάντος: Το έργο και η διαθήκη του (1436)," *Θησαυρίσματα* 18 (1981): 290–98; E. Zachariadou, "Ιστορικά στοιχεία σ' ένα θαύμα του αγίου Φανουρίου," *Αρχαίον Πόντου* 26 (1964): 309–18 and eadem, *Trade and Crusade: Venetian Crete and the Emirates of Menteshe and Aydin (1300–1415)* (Venice, 1983), 62, n. 260; E. Kolias, "Άγιος Φανούριος: ένας μεταλλαγμένος άγιος" in *Χάρης χάρη: Μελέτες στη μνήμη της Χάρης Κάντζια*, ed. A. Giannikouri, vol. 2 (Athens, 2004), 285–305; O. Gratziou, "Όσοι πιστοί προσέλαθετε. . . Προσκυνήματα για αμφότερα τα δόγματα σε μοναστήρια της Κρήτης κατά τη Βενετική περίοδο," in *Μοναστήρια, Οικονομία και Πολιτική: Από τους μεσαιωνικούς στους νεώτερους χρόνους*, ed. E. Kolovos (Herakleion, 2011), 117–39.

44 In reviewing the information in Phanourios's Life and the previous studies on his cult, Olga Gratziou ("Όσοι πιστοί," 122–29) concluded correctly that his was not a preexisting local Rhodian cult that had been transferred to Crete at the time of Ionas Palamas, but that the saint owed his very existence to the ingenuity of the abbot of Valsamonero.

45 There are only brief references to the different aisles in this complex. For a brief overview of the history of the monument and its decoration, see M. Chatzidakis, "Τοιχογραφίες στην Κρήτη," *Κρ. Χρον.* 6 (1952): 72–75; K. Gallas, K. Wessel, and M. Borboudakis, *Byzantinisches Kreta* (Munich, 1983), 313–21; on the architectural history of the monument O. Gratziou, *Η Κρήτη την ύστερη μεσαιωνική εποχή: Η μαρτυρία της εκκλησιαστικής αρχιτεκτονικής* (Herakleion, 2010), 137–39; specifically on the exonarthex Ritzfeld, "Bildpropaganda" (n. 38 above), 387–407. See also N. Pyrrou, "Θεραπευτής και πεταλωτής: Νέα στοιχεία για τον Ρωμανό τον Σκληποδιώκτη από τη μνημειακή ζωγραφική της Κρήτης," *Δελτ. Χρ. Αρχ. Ετ.* 34 (2013): 167–78. On the monastery's library, G. K. Mavromatis, "Η βιβλιοθήκη και η κινητή περιουσία της κρητικής μονής Βαλσαμονέρου (1644)," *Θησαυρίσματα* 30 (1990): 458–99.

46 Gratziou, *Η Κρήτη*, 137–39 and eadem, "Όσοι πιστοί," 121–32.

47 The inscriptions of Valsamonero were published by S. Xanthoudidis, "Χριστιανικαί επιγραφαί εκ Κρήτης," *Αθηνά* 15 (1903): 133–42; G. Gerola, *Monumenti Veneti nell'isola di Creta* (Venice, 1905–32), 4:539–41. Manolis Borboudakis, in a paper presented at the 10th International Congress of Cretan Studies (Chania, October 2006), reinterpreted the inscriptions and presented his conclusions on the dating of the construction phases of Valsamonero.

48 Gratziou, *Η Κρήτη*, 127–83.

49 B. Laourdas, "Κρητικά παλαιογραφικά," *Κρ. Χρον.* 6 (1953): 42–58.



Fig. 14. Valsamonero Monastery, Crete (photo: author)

authorities of Crete.⁵⁰ On their way back to Candia they were captured by “Ismailites,” i.e., Muslims, the common enemies of all Christians. One of the priests was executed on the spot and the rest were enslaved and transported to the town of Palatia (Balat, ancient Miletus), in the emirate of Monteshe in Asia Minor, an area with which incidentally Cretans were quite familiar, thanks to the island’s close commercial ties with the emirate of Monteshe, in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.⁵¹

As the families and friends of the enslaved priests failed in all their efforts to free them, their spiritual father, Ionas (identified by Maria Vassilaki as the abbot of Valsamonero, Ionas Palamas), traveled from Candia to Rhodes, which was then under the control of the Hospitallers, in the hope of negotiating the priests’ release.⁵² Soon Ionas, disheartened by his inability to

accomplish the deed, decided to follow the advice of the metropolitan of Rhodes, Neilos, and visit the monastery of St. Phanourios, a saint hitherto unknown to him, to ask for his help. During his visit to the shrine Ionas met a former prisoner who had just returned from Palatia, only to learn from him that the enslaved priests had been released. Attributing the happy outcome to the intervention of St. Phanourios, and in fulfillment of his vow to the saint, Ionas commissioned an icon of Phanourios which he brought with him to Candia, thus initiating the new cult on Crete. The second part of the *Life* enumerates a list of miracles enacted on Cretan soil which establish Phanourios as a potent heavenly agent answering the prayers of the faithful. The saint excels in revealing lost objects and animals, curing ailments, or protecting people and properties from severe weather phenomena.⁵³ Interestingly, in most cases the grateful beneficiaries, in fulfillment of a vow to the saint, commission icons with his portrait, thus ensuring the proliferation of his representations and the spread of his cult.

The impact of the new cult was such that the name of the saint gradually prevailed over that of the Virgin, to whom the Monastery of Valsamonero had originally been dedicated, and the whole complex became known as the St. Phanourios Monastery. For the decoration of this new cult center the abbot Palamas collaborated

50 N. B. Tomadakis, “Οι ορθόδοξοι παπάδες επί Ενετοκρατίας και η χειροτονία αυτών,” *Κρ. Χρον.* 13 (1959): 39–72, and idem, “Η θρησκευτική πολιτική της Ενετίας εν Κρήτη έναντι των ορθόδοξων Κρητών από τον ΙΓ' έως του ΙΕ' αιώνα,” *Επ. Επ. Φιλ. Σχολ. Αθην.* 20 (1969–70): 21–38; M. Manousakas, “Μέτρα της Βενετίας έναντι της εν Κρήτη επιρροής του Πατριαρχείου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως κατ' ανέκδοτα βενετικά έγγραφα (1418–1419),” *Επ. Επ. Βυζ. Σπ.* 30 (1960): 85–144.

51 Zachariadou, *Trade and Crusade* (n. 43 above).

52 On the presence and role of the Hospitallers in Rhodes, see A. T. Luttrell, *The Hospitallers in Cyprus, Rhodes, Greece and the West 1291–1440, Collected Studies* (London, 1978).

53 *Acta Sanctorum Maii Tomus Sextus* (Paris and Rome, 1866), 686–91. For analyses of his *Life* see n. 43 above.

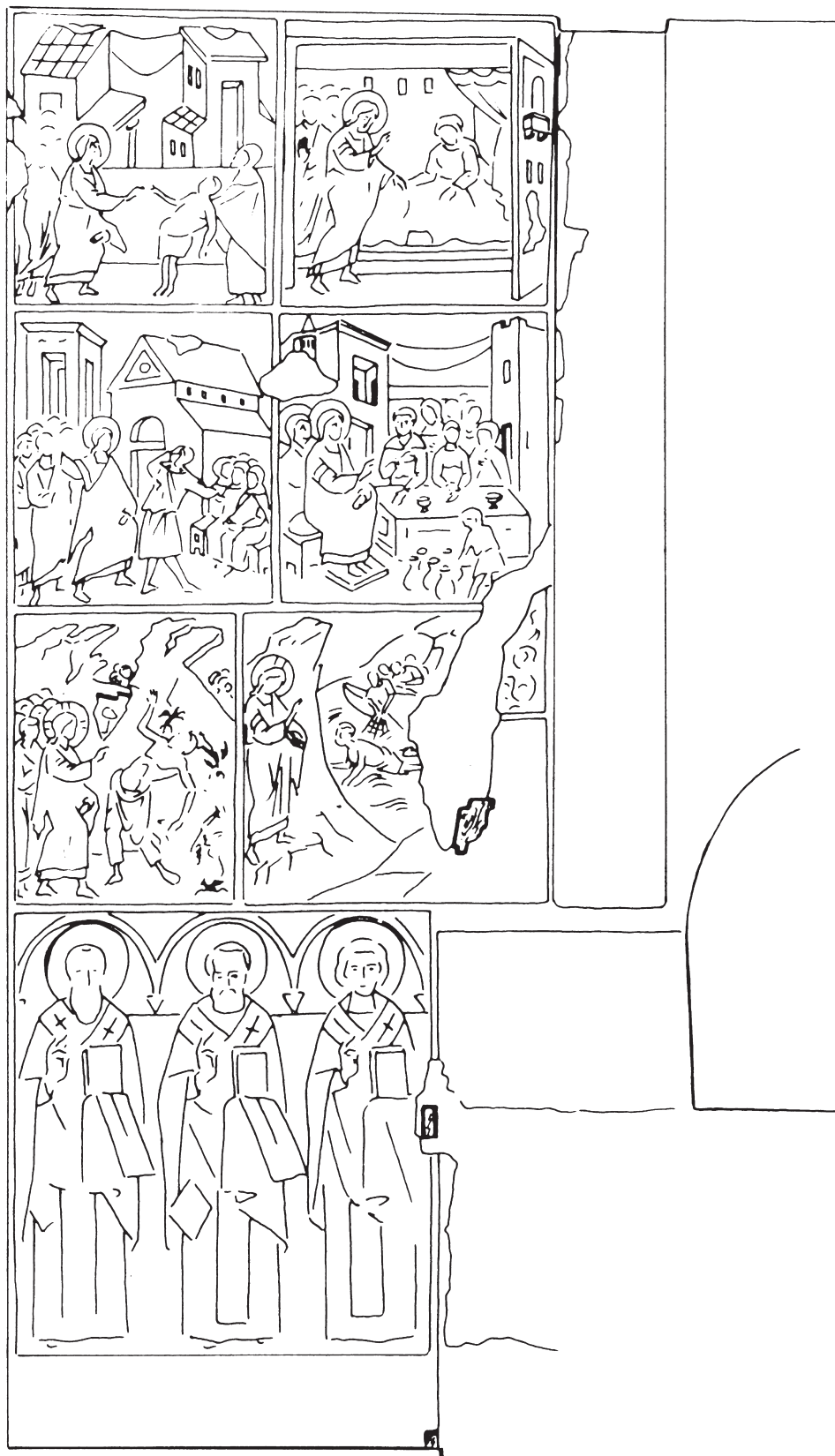




Fig. 15. Drawings of the wall paintings in the chapel of Saint Phanourios, Valsamonero, painted by Konstantinos Eirinikos, 1430–31 (after K. Gallas, K. Wessel, and M. Borboudakis, *Byzantinisches Kreta* [Munich, 1983], 320; drawings by Takis Moschos)

in 1430/31 with a skilled painter residing in Candia, Konstantinos Eirinikos. The latter is known only from the dedicatory inscription in this church and a notarial act in which he commissioned a mason to build him a large house with two chambers and a reception room—from which we may surmise that Eirinikos was quite affluent as was his contemporary and fellow painter Angelos Akotantos.⁵⁴

The program in the St. Phanourios chapel includes six scenes of Christ's miracles, which by analogy lend prestige and substance to the cycle of miracles of St. Phanourios depicted opposite them (fig. 15). No doubt the painter Konstantinos Eirinikos created the

Phanourios cycle in accordance with the Life, which must have been composed recently, probably on the instructions of Palamas. Apart from the miracle scenes, where the saint is depicted in court dress, as is often the case with military saints, there is a large portrait in which Phanourios is depicted full length as a military, dragon-killer soldier saint in a scene emblematic of military saints in Cretan painting.⁵⁵ The composition, full of motion and energy, is dominated by intense diagonals in the saint's pose,⁵⁶ differentiating him from the more static portraits of his far more famous fellow military saints in the same painted program, to whose exalted company St. Phanourios has now been added. The emphasis on the salvific power of the cult of the

54 M. Cattapan, "Nuovi elenchi e documenti dei pittori in Creta," *Θησαυρίσματα* 9 (1972): 205, no. 57; C. Maltezou, "Métiers et salaires en Crète vénitienne (XV^e siècle)," *ByzFor* 12 (1987): 319–41, esp. 324–26; eadem, "The History of Crete in the Fifteenth Century on the Basis of Archival Documents," in Vassilaki, *Hand of Angelos* (n. 8 above), 33 and more recently "Το επάγγελμα του ζωγράφου στη Βενετοκρατούμενη Κρήτη τον 15^ο αιώνα," *Μουσείο Βενάκι* 13–14 (2013–14): 43–55. On the social and financial status of Angelos Akotantos see Kazanaki-Lappa, "Will of Angelos Akotantos" (n. 31 above), 104–10.

55 The same iconography of a full-length military saint is repeated in three more early fifteenth-century Cretan icons: the portrait of Saint Merkurios in the polyptych discussed above, and two imposing icons of Saint Theodore the Teron signed by Angelos, one in the Byzantine Museum of Athens (Vassilaki, *Hand of Angelos*, 168–69, with earlier bibliography [A. Bekiaris]) and a recently published panel from a private collection, R. Cormack, "Two New Icons by Angelos," *Μουσείο Βενάκι* 13–14 (2013–14): 69–77, figs 5, 6, 9.

56 Weyl Carr, "Labelling Images" (n. 20 above).

new saint is complemented by the inclusion of the Last Judgment, a subject often encountered in contemporary narthex programs on Crete.⁵⁷

More significant still is the program in the small apse of the narthex/chapel, which reveals the patron's intentions (fig. 16). In the lower part it depicts the Divine Liturgy (inscribed Η ΘΕΙΑ ΛΕΙΤΟΥΡΓΙΑ) with Christ in a bejeweled patriarchal sakkos as Great High Priest, standing before a canopied altar. He holds a closed gospel book in one hand and blesses with the other a procession of angels carrying liturgical vessels in a representation of the Great Entrance. Above the Divine Liturgy, there is a Pantokrator in the conch and above that the Holy Trinity. The Pantokrator holds an open gospel book displaying a pericope from Matthew ("he that loveth father or mother . . .," Matthew 10:37). The passage is read during the liturgy of the first Sunday after the Pentecost when, according to the Byzantine liturgical calendar, the feast of All Saints is celebrated.⁵⁸ This choice seems quite fitting for the chapel of a newly introduced saint whose name was not included in the Byzantine synaxarion. The apse program of the chapel is well known from some of the best Palaiologan monuments, such as the Peribleptos at Mistra, where a representation of the Divine Liturgy is depicted below the Holy Trinity in the conch of the Prothesis.⁵⁹ However, in Valsamonero a unique iconographical solution has been devised (fig. 17). The Holy Trinity is depicted as an apocalyptic three-headed angel in an aureole, surrounded by the Evangelist symbols and reverencing angels. This monstrous depiction of the Holy Trinity comes out of Western experimentation with Trinitarian

iconography.⁶⁰ It remains unique among the wall paintings in Crete, but it should be noted that this is not an isolated case of iconographic experimentation with the representation of the Trinity on the island, or indeed in the Byzantine realm in general. From the second half of the thirteenth century, when intense discussions regarding Trinitarian theology dominated the negotiations for the Union of the Churches between Byzantium and the papacy, a variety of iconographic solutions for depicting the Holy Trinity, all of them new to the Byzantine repertoire, appeared in different parts of the Byzantine world.⁶¹ It seems that the heated debates of the day, between Orthodox and Catholics on Trinitarian theology, often stimulated patrons and painters to find more complex iconographic solutions to depicting the Trinity than the traditional Byzantine symbolism, e.g., the Hospitality of Abraham.⁶² In Crete in particular, Trinitarian scenes of Western origin that began to appear in monumental painting from the fourteenth century onward, like the Throne of Mercy, or other figurative representations of the three persons of the Trinity, had paved the way for the three-headed angel of Valsamonero.⁶³ Three-headed angels, though extremely rare, are not completely unknown in

57 For a concise description of the iconographic program of the chapel and the whole complex, Gallas, Wessel, and Borboudakis, *Byzantinisches Kreta* (n. 45 above), 315–21.

58 J. Mateos, *Le typicon de la grande église, Ms Sainte-Croix no. 40, X^e siècle*, vol. 2, *Le cycle des fêtes mobiles*, OCA 166 (Rome, 1963), 144–46.

59 S. Dufrenne, "Images du décor de la Prothèse," *REB* 26 (1968): 297–310; eadem, *Les programmes iconographiques des églises byzantines de Mistra* (Paris, 1970), 53–54, pl. 29, fig. 62. On representations of the Great Entrance in Cretan churches, I. Spatharakis, "Representations of the Great Entrance in Crete," in *Studies in Byzantine Manuscript Illumination and Iconography* (London, 1996), 293–335 and C. Ranoutsaki, *Die Kunst der späten Palaiologenzeit auf Kreta: Kloster Brontisi im Spannungsfeld zwischen Konstantinopel und Venedig* (Leiden, 2011), 80–93.

60 J. Baltrušaitis, *Il Medioevo fantastico: Antichità ed esotismi nell'arte gotica*, 2nd ed. (Milan, 2002), 62–82; A. Hackel, *Die Trinität in der Kunst: Eine ikonographische Untersuchung* (Berlin, 1931), esp. 98–117; W. Kirfel, *Die dreiköpfige Gottheit: Archäologisch-ethnologischer Streifzug durch die Ikonographie der Religionen* (Bonn, 1948); R. Pettazoni, "The Pagan Origins of the Three-Headed Representation of the Christian Trinity," *JWarb* 9 (1946): 135–51.

61 Two of the most interesting examples are encountered in the area of Kastoria, in the thirteenth-century wall paintings of Panaghia Koumbelidiki and Omorphokklesia, M. Paisidou, "Η ανθρωπόμορφη Αγία Τριάδα στον Άγιο Γεώργιο της Ομορφοκκλησίας Καστοριάς," in *Αφιέρωμα στη μνήμη του Σωτήρη Κίτσα* (Thessalonike, 2001), 380–83; C. Mavropoulou-Tsoumi, *Οι τοιχογραφίες του 13^{ου} αιώνα στην Κομνηνική της Καστοριάς* (Thessalonike, 1973), 85–89. On both representations and their interpretation in the context of the theological and political debates of the time, see S. Bogevska, "The Holy Trinity in the Diocese of the Archbishopric of Ochrid in the Second Half of the 13th Century," *Patrimonium* 10 (2012): 139–73.

62 A. Cutler, "Trinity," *ODB* 3:2116–18 and Bogevska, "Holy Trinity," 143–45.

63 I. Spatharakis, *Byzantine Wall Paintings of Crete*, vol. 1, *Rethymnon Province* (London, 1999), 198–206; on the representation of the Throne of Grace in the church of St. George in Xylomachairi, near Prevelis Monastery, see M. Adrianakis, "Τα χριστιανικά μνημεία της επαρχίας του Αγίου Βασιλείου," *Πρακτικά του Διεθνούς Επιστημονικού Συνεδρίου Η επαρχία του Αγίου Βασιλείου από την αρχαιότητα μέχρι σήμερα: Περιβάλλον–Αρχαιολογία–Ιστορία–Κοινωνία*



Fig. 16. Valsamonero Monastery, Sanctuary of the Chapel of St. Phanourios, by Konstantinos Eirnikos, 1430–31 (photo: Ioannis Spatharakis)



Fig. 17. The Holy Trinity, Valsamonero Monastery, Sanctuary of the Chapel of St. Phanourios, by Konstantinos Eiririkos, 1430–31 (photo: Ioannis Spatharakis)

late Byzantine painting, such as, for example, the three-headed heavenly messenger who appears in the dream of the King Nebuchadnezzar, in the narthex of the church of the Virgin Peribleptos in Ohrid (1294/1295)⁶⁴ or the heavily overpainted representation of Holy Wisdom as an enthroned three-headed angel in the scene “Wisdom hath builded her House” (Proverbs 9:1) in the Katholikon of the Chilandar Monastery, on Athos.⁶⁵ However, the three-headed Trinity of Valsamonero is,

(Σπήλι–Πλακιάς 19–23 Οκτωβρίου 2008), vol. 2, *Βυζαντινοί χρόνοι–Βενετοκρατία* (Rethymno, 2014), 13–50, esp. 37–39, fig. 41.

64 C. Grozdanov, “The Painting of the Northern Wall of the Narthex of the Church of the Virgin Peribleptos (St. Kliment) in Ohrid,” *Zograf* 36 (2012): 109–14.

65 On the dating of the Chilandar Katholikon and its wall paintings (1321), M. Markovic and W. T. Hostetter, “Prilog hronologiji gradnje i oslikavanja hilendarskog katolikona,” *Hilandarski Zborniki* 10 (1998): 201–220 (in Serbian with English summary).

as far as I know, the first occurrence in Byzantine art where this theme has been depicted in such a prominent place, above the altar, thus becoming the focal point in a public devotional space. It is noteworthy that a similar iconographic solution, a tricephalus Christ, was chosen a century later for the representation of the Trinity, in an elaborately decorated church painted by the erudite *protopapas* and painter Onouphrios, in St. Nicholas in Shelcan, modern Albania. There, the rare representation of a three-headed Christ with no body has been interpreted convincingly as part of the Unionist visual propaganda promoted by the energetic Archbishop of Ochrid Prochoros (ca. 1525–50).⁶⁶ In

66 E. Drakopoulou, “Comments on the Artistic Interchange between Conquered Byzantium and Venice as well as on Its Political Background,” *Zograf* 36 (2012): 179–88, fig. 9 and eadem, “Τέχνη και χορηγία στην Αρχιεπισκοπή Αχρίδας μετά την οθωμανική

the St. Phanourios chapel, however, despite the bold combination of elements from Byzantine and Western iconography, there is nothing in the apse paintings to show Palamas's position on the burning issue of the day regarding Trinitarian theology, the filioque.⁶⁷ For all their iconographical eloquence or rather their "bilingualism," the scenes remain dogmatically mute.

As was to be expected, in addition to erecting the Phanourios shrine and decorating it with wall paintings, Ionas Palamas also endowed it with the necessary devotional icons. In this case, however, the abbot of Valsamonero did not collaborate with the master of wall paintings Konstantinos Eirnikos, but commissioned them instead from the most renowned icon painter of his day, Angelos Akotantos. Maria Vassilaki, an expert on Angelos's art, believes that "it is clear that Angelos was entirely responsible for developing the iconography of St. Phanourios, since all the extant fifteenth-century icons depicting the saint were painted by him," a conviction shared by many scholars.⁶⁸ However, the role of Konstantinos Eirnikos in shaping the devotional space of the saint's first and foremost

shrine in Valsamonero, a role proudly proclaimed in the chapel's dedicatory inscription, cannot be overlooked or dismissed out of hand. Icons may have been the most effective agents for the spread of the new cult, but as a pilgrimage site Valsamonero remained the epicenter of devotional practices honoring the saint, and there the role of Eirnikos in defining the makeup of the shrine had indeed been decisive. It is impossible to tell if the two painters worked together to complete this complex commission, or if, for unknown reasons, one succeeded the other in collaborating with the enterprising abbot of Valsamonero. Whatever the exact nature of their synergy for the Valsamonero project, one cannot avoid observing that in this instance we are witnessing a sophisticated division of labor between two highly skilled Candiotte painters, each with acknowledged excellence in a different form of religious painting: Angelos Akotantos in icons and Konstantinos Eirnikos in wall paintings. Though little is known about the latter, the textual and artistic evidence relating to the life and work of Angelos so far suggests that he probably concentrated on panel painting.⁶⁹ This division of labor between the two painters points to quite a refined and highly specialized art market and at the same time confirms that Ionas Palamas was an exacting patron, conversant with all aspects of the contemporary art scene.

Be that as it may, three icons by Angelos from Valsamonero are housed today in the nearby Monastery of Vrontisi, a former dependency of Valsamonero. One of them (which might or might not have been destined for the diminutive Phanourios chapel)⁷⁰ is a Christ

κατάκτηση," in *Δασκάλα: Απόδοση τιμής στην καθηγήτρια Μαίρη Παναγιωτίδη-Κεσίσογλου*, ed. P. Petridis and V. Foskoulou (Athens, 2015), 139–60.

67 From the rich literature on the fierce debates between Orthodox and Catholic theologians regarding the procession of the Holy Spirit see particularly P. Gemeinhardt, *Die Filioque-Kontroverse zwischen Ost- und Westkirche im Frühmittelalter* (Berlin and New York, 2002); T. Alexopoulos, *Der Ausgang des Thearchischen Geistes: Eine Untersuchung der Filioque-Frage anhand Photios' "Mystagogie", Konstantin Melitiniotes' "Zwei Antirrhethici" und Augustins "De Trinitate"* (Göttingen, 2009); A. E. Sicienski, *The Filioque: History of a Doctrinal Controversy* (New York, 2010); T. Alexopoulos, "Die Argumentation des Patriarchen Gregorios II. Kyprios zur Widerlegung des Filioque-Ansatzes in der Schrift *De Processione Spiritus Sancti*," *BZ* 104 (2011): 1–39.

68 M. Vassilaki, "The Hand of Angelos?," in eadem, *Painter Angelos* (n. 34 above), 179 and eadem, "The Art of Painter Angelos" in eadem, *Hand of Angelos* (n. 8 above), 117. Her opinion is shared by other scholars as for example *ibid.*, no. 19 (A. Mitsani) and Gratziou "Όσοι πιστοί" (n. 43 above). I do not agree with Vassilaki's assessment that all fifteenth-century icons of Phanourios should be attributed to Angelos. As I have maintained elsewhere, at least two fifteenth-century icons of the saint in Athenian collections should be attributed to different painters. See Drandaki, *Greek Icons* (n. 22 above), 38–40 and Vassilaki, *Hand of Angelos*, 150–51, no. 24 (A. Drandaki). Furthermore, despite Angelos's evident specialization in Phanourios iconography, it seems somewhat implausible that, in the course of the fifteenth century, when his cult was spreading fast, no other Cretan painter was commissioned to paint Phanourios's portrait.

69 Maria Vassilaki ("Hand of Angelos?," 186–200; *Hand of Angelos*, 119–23) has tentatively attributed to Angelos the wall paintings in the narthex of the katholikon of the monastery of St. John the Theologian on Patmos. However, these wall paintings, though clearly related to Cretan painting, are I believe later creations, probably dating to around 1500. Certainly, as Maria Vassilaki observes, no clear conclusions on their dating and attribution can be drawn prior to their conservation. On these wall paintings, see Chatzidakis, *Icons of Patmos* (n. 8 above), 32–34 and E. Kollias, "Frescoes" in *Patmos: Treasures of the Monastery*, ed. A. Kominis (Athens, 1988), 57–59, both proposing a very late date, around 1600.

70 On the possible original placement of these icons in the Valsamonero complex, see Gratziou "Όσοι πιστοί" (n. 43 above), 130, and n. 27, where she rightly observes that the apse of the Phanourios chapel is too small to accommodate three fairly large icons. It is possible however that at least one of Angelos's icons (possibly Christ the Vine?) may have hung on the templon of one of the two other aisles in the church.

the Vine, an early Christian theme emphasizing the strength that lay in the unity of the life-giving Church, as expressed in Christ's words to his disciples (John 15:1–7).⁷¹ The popularity of the theme appears to have been revived in the late Byzantine period, in Venetian Crete in particular, as attested by an imposing wall painting that decorates the west wall of the narthex in the church of Christ the Savior in Akoumia, in the Rethymno district, dated by inscription to 1389.⁷² For the image of Christ the Vine, as well as for several other icons that later became standards among Cretan painters,⁷³ Angelos Akotantos did not invent a new composition, but rather adopted a preexisting iconographic theme and adjusted it to perfection to panel painting, the artistic medium in which he was the undisputed authority.⁷⁴ The other two icons Angelos painted for the Valsamonero Monastery feature the new saint. It is worth noting that the promotion of the new

saint was never centered on the discovery of his relics. No bodily remains of Phanourios were ever produced as tangible proofs of his existence, so the promotion of his cult rested solely upon the saint's miraculous powers of intercession, conveyed through images.

One of the Phanourios icons depicts him in military attire, crowned by an angel (fig. 18).⁷⁵ He is seated on a throne, with his feet resting on the defeated dragon. This icon was made probably for the templon of the small chapel, while the second Phanourios icon is bilateral, destined for proskyneseis and processions (fig. 19).⁷⁶ It depicts the saint on one side full length, with the defeated dragon once again at his feet (we now see only his paw and claws grasping the saint's shield, because the lower part of the icon has been cut off). The reverse is a vita icon, perfectly suited to the cult center of any saint.⁷⁷ Phanourios is conversing with the enthroned Christ in the large central image, while six scenes from his life were originally arranged on

71 C. Leonardi, *Ampelos: Il simbolo della vite nell'arte pagana e paleochristiana* (Rome, 1947); A. G. Mantas, "The Iconographic Subject 'Christ the Vine' in Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Art," *Δελτ. Χρ. Αρχ. Ετ.* 24 (2003): 347–60.

72 M. Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, "Παρατηρήσεις στις τοιχογραφίες του ναού του Σωτήρος στα Ακούμια Ρεθύμνης: Εικονογραφία και νοήματα," in *Πρακτικά του Διεθνούς Επιστημονικού Συνεδρίου Η επαρχία του Αγίου Βασιλείου από την αρχαιότητα μέχρι σήμερα. Περιβάλλον-Αρχαιολογία-Ιστορία-Κοινωνία (Σπήλι-Πλακιάς 19–23 Οκτωβρίου 2008)*, vol. 2, *Βυζαντινοί χρόνοι-Βενετοκρατία* (Rethymno, 2014), 51–110, esp. 79, 91–92, figs 53–54; I. Spatharakis, *Byzantine Wall Paintings of Crete*, vol. 4, *Agios Basileios Province* (Leiden, 2015), 29, 211, figs 51–52.

73 Angelos's compositions, such as the Embrace of Peter and Paul, St. John dictating to Prochoros, St. George on Horseback, or the Virgin Kardiotissa, are all variations of well-known Palaiologan images that would be crystallized in the repertoire of Cretan painters in subsequent centuries; see Vassilaki, *Hand of Angelos* (n. 8 above), nos. 25–27, 31, 37, 40.

74 It has been assumed that the inspiration for the iconography of the theme Christ the Vine belonged to Angelos. See A. G. Mantas, "Iconographic Subject" (n. 71 above); Vassilaki, *Hand of Angelos*, (n. 8 above), 158–63, with earlier bibliography; Weyl Carr, "Labelling Images" (n. 20 above), 105. However, as Maria Constantoudaki-Kitromilides has observed in her detailed publication of the church in Akoumia ("Παρατηρήσεις" [n. 72 above], 91–92), the wall painting of Christ the Vine there, dating about three decades before Angelos's time, proves that the famous icon painter made use of an already known composition. Judging by the mediocre quality of the wall paintings in Akoumia, it doesn't seem plausible that their provincial painter was the creator of this composition, whose exact source still eludes us. Overall, the decoration of 1389 in Akoumia is an interesting ensemble, with several conspicuous Italian elements woven into what was a rather conventional program for a Cretan narthex.

75 Vassilakes-Mavrakakes, "Saint Phanourios" (n. 43 above), 230–31, 235–36, figs 53a, 54a; *Εικόνες της Κρητικής τέχνης* (n. 8 above), 480, no. 123 (M. Borboudakis); Vassilaki, *Hand of Angelos*, 146–47, no. 22 (M. Borboudakis).

76 M. Borboudakis, "Βυζαντινά και Μεσαιωνικά Μνημεία Κρήτης," *Αρχ. Δελτ.* 29 (1973–74): B3, 941, pl. 715b–c; Vassilakes-Mavrakakes, "Saint Phanourios," 233–24, figs. 51b, 56b, 60c–d; Chatzidakis, *Icons of the Cretan School* (n. 8 above), 22–23, no. 7; Borboudakis, *Εικόνες της Κρητικής τέχνης* (n. 8 above), 478–79, no. 122 (M. Borboudakis).

77 On vita icons and their function see the seminal articles by Nancy P. Sevcenko: "Vita Icons and 'Decorated' Icons of the Komnenian Period," in *Four Icons in the Menil Collection*, ed. B. Davezac (Houston, 1992), 56–69 and "The Vita Icon and the Painter as Hagiographer," *DOP* 53 (1999): 149–65 (both reprinted in eadem, *The Celebration of the Saints in Byzantine Art and Liturgy* [Farnham, 2013], VI–VII). See also G. Tsantilas, "Η λατρεία του αγίου Προκοπίου την περίοδο των Σταυροφορών και η βιογραφική εικόνα του στο Πατριαρχείο Ιεροσολύμων," *Δελτ. Χρ. Αρχ. Ετ.* 27 (2006): 245–58, and more recently P. Chatterjee, *The Living Icon in Byzantium and Italy: The Vita Image, Eleventh to Thirteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 2014). On the dependence of Byzantine vita icons on the hagiographic tradition of saint's Lives, T. Papamastorakis, "Pictorial Lives: Narrative in Thirteenth-Century Vita Icons," *Μουσείο Βενάκι* 7 (2007): 33–65. For information from the sources regarding the use of vita icons in Byzantine shrines, see A. Drandaki, "Through Pilgrims' Eyes: Mt. Sinai in Pilgrim Narratives of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries," *Δελτ. Χρ. Αρχ. Ετ.* 27 (2006): 491–504. On vita icons in Italy, see J. Cannon, "Beyond the Limitations of Visual Typology: Reconsidering the Function and Audience of Three Vita Panels of Women Saints c. 1300," in Schmidt, *Italian Panel Painting* (n. 29 above), 291–313.



Fig. 18. Icon with St. Phanourios enthroned, by Angelos, Valsamonero, ca. 1430/31, now in Vrontisi Monastery (photo: Benaki Museum Conservation Department)



Fig. 19. Two-sided icon of St. Phanourios, by Angelos, Valsamonero, ca. 1430/31, now in Vrontisi Monastery (photo: Benaki Museum Conservation Department)

the upper and lower sides of the panel (again the three scenes on the lower part have been cut off).

A close examination of the iconography and style of these icons reveals a well-thought-out combination of Byzantine and Italian elements, carefully stitched together to articulate the character of the devotional space dedicated to the new saint. The icon with the enthroned Phanourios, where he is depicted as a triumphant yet ever-vigilant guardian, remains faithful to well-known Byzantine depictions of the same subject, attested mostly from images of the enthroned St. Demetrios.⁷⁸ Yet we know that this theme was full of

ideological connotations and messages for the Venetian audience as well, as two marble icons of similar iconography, dedicated to Saint Demetrios and Saint George, were immured in prominent places above the main entrance to the basilica of San Marco in Venice (fig. 20). As an iconographic type, therefore, the enthroned military saint carried manifold meanings for a Venetian territory.⁷⁹

78 A series of *aspra trachea* coins minted in Thessalonike in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries depicts St. Demetrios enthroned, with his sword half-drawn from its sheath; see P. Grierson, *Byzantine Coins* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1982), 303, nos. 1368–69. The same iconography is repeated on a late twelfth–early thirteenth-century icon of the saint in the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow and on the reverse of a fourteenth-century bilateral icon from Kastoria. On the icon in Moscow see K. Onasch, *Ikonen* (Berlin, 1961), 343–44, pl. 4;

V. Antonova and N. E. Mneva, *Gosudarstvennaia Tret'iakovskaia galleriia: Katalog drevnerusskoi zhivopisi*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1963), 71–73, no. 10, figs. 15–16; *Gosudarstvennaia Tret'iakovskaia galleriia: Katalog sobrania; Drevnerusskoi iskusstvo X–XV veka*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1995), 66–67, no. 14. On the Kastoria icon, I. Sisiou, “Άγιος Γεώργιος ο Μέγας Δούκας—εικόνα του Μουσείου Καστοριάς,” *Zograf* 38 (2014): 99–112, figs. 17, 19. See also A. Dumitrescu, “Une iconographie peu habituelle: Les saints militaires siégeant; Le cas de Saint-Nicholas d’Arges,” *Byzantion* 59 (1989): 48–53 and C. Walter, *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition* (Turnhout, 2003), 80.

79 See the studies by O. Demus: “Die Relieffikonen der Westfassade von San Marco: Bemerkungen zur venezianischen Plastik und Ikonographie des 13. Jahrhunderts” and “Der Skulpturale



Fig. 20. Marble icons with enthroned Saints George and Demetrios immured in the west facade of San Marco, Venice (photo: author)

Fig. 21.
St. Eleutherios with
scenes from his life.
Crete, third quarter of
the sixteenth century.
Athens, Byzantine and
Christian Museum
(photo: Byzantine and
Christian Museum)



Even more interesting is the layout and combination of styles and iconography evident in the two-sided icon of St. Phanourios. The figure of the standing

Fassadenschmuck des 13. Jahrhunderts,” in *Studies in Byzantium, Venice and the West*, by O. Demus, ed. I. Hutter (London, 1998), XIV, 120–37 and XIX, 187–205; *The Church of San Marco in Venice: History, Architecture, Sculpture* (Washington, DC, 1960), 128–31, fig. 40; M. Jacoff, “Fashioning a Façade: The Construction of Venetian Identity on the Exterior of San Marco,” in Maguire and Nelson, *San Marco* (n. 24 above), 113–49.

military saint has been treated differently on each of the two sides, observing Byzantine norms on the obverse while adopting a Late Gothic model on the reverse. These differences are particularly pronounced in the treatment of the military accoutrements, such as his sword and his chainmail, but also in the rendering of his hose and boots.

Equally intriguing is the layout chosen for the vita side of the panel. As is well known, vita icons had become widespread in both the Byzantine East and in

the West, in Italy in particular, from the early thirteenth century, but the arrangement of the scenes around the central, devotional portrait of the saint thus honored takes a different form in each tradition. In Byzantium scenes from the life of the saint were arranged on the four sides around the central figure, often to be read in sequence in much the same way as written inscriptions such as epigrams were arranged around a central theme, as pointed out by Titos Papamastorakis.⁸⁰ In Western examples of vita icons on the other hand, the episodes are usually organized vertically, in two columns left and right of the central representation.⁸¹ By the fifteenth century, either of these arrangements would have been familiar to the Orthodox and Catholic congregations of Crete. However, for his Phanourios icon Palamas has chosen neither. He has opted instead for a third solution, with the scenes set horizontally on the upper and lower edges of the panel. This layout was hitherto known only from a handful of Western panels, like the devotional icon of Santa Agata in Cremona (Lombardy), dated to the late thirteenth century, or a variation, with a single row of three scenes in the majestic vita panel of St. Francis by Giotto, now in the Louvre.⁸² It is interesting to note that a variation of this rather unconventional type of vita icon, which never became fashionable in other parts of the Greek world or in Western Europe, recurs on another, later Cretan panel, which also displays visual and textual features of mixed origin. The icon is dedicated to St. Eleutherios, who was venerated both in the Greek Orthodox and the Latin world, despite the different hagiographical traditions in each church (fig. 21). The saint is depicted in a frontal, half-length portrait, with four scenes from his life arranged in a single row at the top of the panel. The portrait, which retains its traditional Byzantine style and iconography, shows all the traits of a good Cretan workshop of the third quarter of the sixteenth century.⁸³ Surprisingly though, while the inscription identifying

Saint Eleutherios is written in Greek, the text on the Gospel book he holds open is bilingual, Greek and Latin (John 10:1), indicating that the panel, with its rather unconventional layout, was addressed to a multi-ethnic and in all probability religiously mixed audience.

Returning to the cult of St. Phanourios, we find five more icons of the new saint signed by or attributed to Angelos, two made for the Hodegetria Monastery in Kainourio district, south of Candia, where a second center for the cult of Phanourios seems to have been launched at about the same time as Valsamonero.⁸⁴ In fact the icons commissioned by the two monasteries, around the same time, share many similarities, including each having a pair of panels of the new saint and an icon with Christ the Vine.⁸⁵ Of the Phanourios panels painted for the Hodegetria Monastery, one is a full-length portrait of the saint in the familiar iconographic type encountered on his bilateral icon for Valsamonero.⁸⁶ The other panel is an inspired and innovative two-tiered icon with the Noli me Tangere and a miracle of St. Phanourios. It could be the subject of a dissertation on the conscious combination of Italian and Palaiologan features, expressed here in a perfectly realized theological and artistic balance (fig. 22).⁸⁷ Once again, as in the program of wall paintings in the Valsamonero chapel, the iconography and style of the icon reveal a meticulous and well-thought-out theological program behind it.

The icon is divided into two unequal registers. The upper tier depicts the Noli me Tangere, and the taller, lower register depicts what we could call the “foundation myth” of the Phanourios cult, a miracle

80 Papamastorakis, “Pictorial Lives” (n. 77 above).

81 Cannon, “Beyond the Limitations” (n. 77 above).

82 E. Castelnuovo, “Mille vie della pittura italiana,” in *La pittura in Italia, Il Duecento e il Trecento*, ed. E. Castelnuovo, vol. 1 (Milan, 2003), fig. 5; J. Gardner, “The Louvre Stigmatization and the Problem of the Narrative Altarpiece,” *ZKunstg* 45 (1982): 217–47, repr. in *Patrons, Painters and Saints: Studies in Medieval Italian Painting* (Aldershot, 1993), no. VI.

83 Borboudakis, *Εικόνες της Κρητικής τέχνης* (n. 8 above), 564–65, no. 212 (K.-Ph. Kalaphati).

84 Vassilaki, *Hand of Angelos* (n. 8 above), nos. 18 and 20, entries by M. Vassilaki and M. Borboudakis. The other two icons of St. Phanourios by Angelos are kept in the church of the Megali Panagia in the Chora of Patmos and in the early eighteenth-century church of St. Catherine and St. Phanourios on Pholegandros; see *ibid.*, nos. 17, 19, 23, 24, entries by M. Vassilaki and A. Mitsani. Another icon of Phanourios signed by Angelos was published recently by Cormack, “Two New Icons” (n. 55 above). Two more full-length portraits of the saint in private collections in Athens have been attributed to Angelos but in my view are somewhat later, fifteenth-century copies made by competent followers of Angelos (see n. 68 above).

85 For the Hodegetria Monastery, Angelos painted also an Embrace of Peter and Paul and the Virgin Zoodochos Pege; see Vassilaki, *Hand of Angelos*, nos. 25, 29, and 34, entries by M. Borboudakis.

86 Vassilaki, *Hand of Angelos*, no. 18 (M. Vassilaki).

87 Drandaki, *Origins of El Greco* (n. 8 above), 50, no. 7 (A. Drandaki).



Fig. 22. Icon with the *Noli me Tangere* and a Miracle of St. Phanourios. Attributed to Angelos, ca. 1430. From the Hodegetria Monastery, Heraklion, Museum of Christian Art “Saint Catherine of the Sinaites,” Archbishopric of Crete (photo: Benaki Museum Conservation Department)

closely associated with Crete and the establishment of his cult on the island, i.e., the saint’s miraculous intervention in rescuing the released Cretan priests on their return journey to Crete. The combination of the two episodes highlights the soteriological significance of Phanourios’s cult. With the miracle of the new saint placed directly below the message of salvation delivered to humanity by the resurrected Christ, the saint emerges alongside the Theotokos as the intermediary par excellence, a successful intercessor on behalf of the faithful and more specifically the Cretan faithful.

The juxtaposition of features from Palaiologan art with Late Gothic elements is once again one of the more prominent features of the icon, and the way they are used is by no means random. In the *Noli me Tangere*, the two kneeling women on either side of the resplendent, resurrected, Byzantine Christ, are Italianate figures, the imposing physical presence of whose bodies is accentuated by the soft drapery of their garments (fig. 23). They are carefully labeled as Mother of God and the Magdalene. In this case the Late Gothic style selected for their modeling goes hand in hand with specific theological references. Mary Magdalene’s loose, blonde hair and bright red maphorion are specific references to her identity as the repentant sinner of the Western theological tradition rather than that of the sober and virtuous Magdalene of Byzantine sermons, a subject thoroughly investigated recently by Vicky Foskolou.⁸⁸ If I am not mistaken, this is one of the first occurrences of the Western Magdalene in a *Noli me Tangere* scene on Crete. The dramatic change in her theological personality and artistic appearance becomes clearer when we compare her with the unnamed, prostrate woman in the same scene in the nave of the Valsamonero church, painted only a few years before the introduction of the Phanourios cult (fig. 24).

From another point of view, the study of this icon offers new insights into the ways the painter worked in order to fulfill this theologically and pictorially complex commission. A technical examination conducted

88 See the two articles by V. Foskolou: “Mary Magdalene between East and West: Cult and Image, Relics and Politics in the Late Thirteenth-Century Eastern Mediterranean,” *DOP* 65–66 (2013): 271–96 and more recently “Η Ξανθομαλλούσα αδελφή του Λαζάρου στην Όμορφη Εκκλησιά της Αθήνας: Μία ακόμη πρόταση ιστορικής ανάγνωσης των «δυτικών επιδράσεων» στην τέχνη της λατινοκρατούμενης Ανατολής,” in Petridis and Foskolou, *Δασκάλα* (n. 66 above), 507–23.



Fig. 23. Noli me Tangere, detail of fig. 22 (photo: Benaki Museum Conservation Department)

in the Benaki Conservation Lab revealed that the artist used a technique for rendering the soft folds in the women's garments different from that employed in the traditional geometric striations on the draperies of Phanourios or the Virgin in the miracle scene below.⁸⁹ The artist delineated the soft folds of the draperies with a multitude of fine lines, using their fluctuating density to render the darker and lighter tones of the garment's folds. This technique, well known from Italian paintings of the trecento and early

quattrocento, is fundamentally different from the use of successive layers of gradually lighter tones in order to create the geometric draperies of Byzantine figures (fig. 25).⁹⁰ I should also note that this technique has not been identified in any of the other eight icons bearing the signature of Angelos that have been similarly examined.⁹¹ It is clear that the painter of our icon (presumably Angelos?) was able not simply to imitate the iconography and style of Italian works while employing traditional Byzantine painterly methods, but had also mastered the technical skills necessary to express himself in a genuinely Italian idiom. Yet, the faces of all his holy figures remain insistently Byzantine and it

89 K. Milanou, Ch. Vourvopoulou, L. Vranopoulou, and A. Kalliga, "Τεχνολογική εξέταση κρητικών εικόνων που χρονολογούνται από τα τέλη του 14ου έως τα μέσα του 15ου αιώνα," *Museum Benaki* 13–14 (2013–14): 251–72. I am most indebted to my colleagues and long-time collaborators for sharing with me the results of their ongoing project, which complements the research published in their book *Icons by the Hand of Angelos: The Painting Method of a Fifteenth-Century Cretan Painter* (Athens, 2008).

90 D. Bomford, J. Dunkerton, D. Gordon, and A. Roy, *Art in the Making: Italian Painting before 1400* (London, 1989), figs. 45–46, 56–59, 82, 90–92.

91 Milanou et al., *Icons by the Hand of Angelos*, 43–49, 51–69.

Fig. 24.
Noli me Tangere,
wall painting from
Valsamonero, aisle
of the Virgin. 1407.
(photo: author)



is only to the layman and priests of the miracle scene that the artist feels free to give the individual features reminiscent of portraiture (fig. 26).

From the preceding observations it has, I hope, become clear that the wall paintings and icons commissioned to launch the new cult were full of combined visual references to both the Orthodox tradition and Byzantine pictorial ways, and to Catholic theology and its expression in Italian art. In the deliberately mixed character of these paintings we can clearly discern the intention of the patron, Ionas Palamas (in this case also the agency behind the new cult), to create a devotional

space hospitable to both Catholic and Orthodox pilgrims in Crete.⁹² The meticulously studied and theologically eloquent mixed pictorial idiom was perfectly adapted to Palamas's policy of rapprochement between the two communities. At a time when the discussions over the Union of the Churches were at their peak, on the eve of the Council of Ferrara-Florence, Palamas embarked on a mission to set up a hitherto unknown saint who had no prior history or connotations for either rite, but with features and powers that

92 Gratziou, "Όσοι πιστοί" (n. 43 above), 117–39.



Fig. 25.
Infrared reflectograms
from the representations
of the Virgin on the
two-tiered icon from the
Hodegetria Monastery
(photo: Benaki Museum
Conservation Department)



Fig. 26. Details from fig. 22.

would be recognized and were indeed much needed by both. In an excursus on the Valsamonero three-headed Trinity, Ioannis Spatharakis concludes that the abbot and monks of the monastery of St. Phanourios may have become converts to Catholicism.⁹³ This image, so alien to the Byzantine iconographical repertoire, if studied in isolation and not in the wider context of the new cult, might indeed lead to that conclusion. But when seen as part and parcel of a coordinated project, comprised of multiple textual and visual components, then Palamas's theological construct can be best understood as highly sophisticated, pro-Union propaganda, addressed specifically to the society of Venetian Crete. As Olga Gratziou has noted in relation to the Vita of Phanourios: "it contains all those elements that favored a policy of reconciliation of the two churches from the Orthodox point of view."⁹⁴ Over and above this assessment of the Life of St. Phanourios, which I fully endorse, I would argue that a hybrid pictorial idiom was also employed to offer visual support to the strategic goals of the new cult. The fact that at least one of the two painters Palamas hired, Angelos Akotantos, was later appointed *protopsaltis*, first cantor of Candia (i.e., the second rank of church officials in the Orthodox church in Crete) by the Venetian authorities,⁹⁵ supports the idea that the two men did not simply collaborate on the Valsamonero project,

but shared a deeper understanding thanks to their common religious beliefs and their service in the same cause.⁹⁶ Recently, in an article discussing the historic circumstances and the agency behind the decoration of the exonarthex of Valsamonero, Ulrike Ritzerfeld suggested that it was financed by Lauro Querini, a Creto-Venetian humanist and fervent supporter of the Union of the Churches who retained close ties with Bessarion and the other pro-Unionists on Crete.⁹⁷ Though Ritzerfeld's study focuses solely on the exonarthex, the latest of the extensions added to the building complex, her suggestion puts my interpretation of the Phanourios cult and the visual means employed to promote it in a new light. If her assumption is correct, then the ties between Valsamonero and the elite circles of Pro-Unionists in Crete would appear to have been more conspicuous and long-standing than might otherwise have been suspected and the cult of Phanourios an important step toward the fulfillment of a general plan for the rapprochement of the two congregations.

The conscious choices that led to the formation of the hybrid artistic language we saw in the two ensembles I have discussed in this paper do not in any way imply an awareness on the part of the patrons or artists involved of a historical perspective, i.e., of a sense of distance from the traditional Byzantine past, in the way that late fourteenth-century Italian artists like Cennino Cennini saw the artistic movement they participated in as a break from an older style.⁹⁸ Quite the contrary. This mixed idiom, recognizable in several Cretan paintings of the late fourteenth and the first half of the fifteenth century, was constantly deployed in such a way as to remain an integral part of a long Greek tradition and to underplay the innovative character of the religious works to which it was applied by complying with centuries-old conventions regarding the iconographic programs and

93 Spatharakis, "Representations of the Great Entrance" (n. 59 above), XVII, 293–335, esp. 311.

94 Gratziou, *H Κρήτη* (n. 45 above), 137–44, esp. 143–44. Gratziou concludes that Palamas was a supporter of Orthodoxy and that in launching the Phanourios cult he was attempting to proselytize Catholics; see *ibid.* and eadem, "Όσοι πιστοί" (n. 43 above), 129–32. The exact meaning of the term "Orthodox," at a time when the Greek Church was itself deeply divided over the proposed union with Rome, seems to have been a highly contested topic. Furthermore, I am not certain that there is enough evidence to support the idea that the Greek Orthodox church of Crete, on the defensive at the time, could have launched programmatic proselytizing to counterbalance the systematic preaching and aggressive policy of the Latin church and its mendicant orders. In my view, the pro-Union strategy I discern behind Palamas's initiatives was aimed more at smoothing out the differences between the two congregations in order to create an environment acceptable to both.

95 On the religious policy of Venice on Crete, see nn. 6 and 50 above. Also see S. Spanakis, "Συμβολή στην εκκλησιαστική ιστορία της Κρήτης κατά τη Βενετοκρατία," *Κρ. Χρον.* 13 (1959): 243–88 and Z. N. Tsiapanlis, *Το κληροδότημα του Καρδινάλιου Βησσαρίωνος για τους φιλενωτικούς της Βενετοκρατούμενης Κρήτης (1439–17^{ος} αι.)* (Thessalonike, 1967), 33–34.

96 On Angelos's life, see M. Manoussakas, "Η διαθήκη του Αγγέλου Ακοτάντου, αγνώστου κρητικού ζωγράφου," *Δελτ. Χρ. Αρχ. Ετ.* 2 (1960–61): 139–51; M. Vassilaki, "The Painter Angelos Akotantos: His Work and His Will (1436)," in Vassilaki, *Painter Angelos* (n. 34 above), 3–15; M. Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, "The Painter Anghelos Akotantos: New Biographical Details from Unpublished Documents," in Aspra-Vardavaki, *Λαμπηδών* (n. 4 above), 2:499–508; Kazanaki-Lappa, "Will of Angelos Akotantos" (n. 31 above); Newall, "Candia and Post-Byzantine Icons" (n. 8 above).

97 Ritzerfeld, "Bildpropaganda" (n. 38 above), 400–407.

98 B. Cole, "Old in New in the Early Trecento," *FlorMitt* 17, nos. 2–3 (1973): 229–48, esp. 58–60.

theological topoi that defined Byzantine religious painting. The multifarious elements, so carefully combined in this idiom, retain almost unchanged the characteristics of each tiny part. The process and the resulting new images remind me of pictorial centos, a visual counterpart of the literary form, popular from Roman times, in which erudite intellectuals selected, rearranged, and stitched together verses or excerpts from well-known literary works, such as Homer's *Iliad* or Virgil's *Aeneid*, to mention two particularly illustrious examples, in order to create a new narrative, a patchwork of separate, recognizable units.⁹⁹ This description, translated into visual language, could very well apply to the polyptych and even better to the Phanourios wall paintings and icons: pictorial units, astutely brought together by erudite patrons and skilled artists; units that, though immediately familiar and identifiable as belonging to diverse backgrounds, created a new and meaningful narrative through their juxtaposition. That they each retained their distinctive characteristics was not fortuitous or due to the painters' inability to develop a more homogeneous and innovative style. I see it primarily as an intentional attempt to evoke familiarity with and create devotion toward highly revered cult images, thus engaging the attention of a mixed audience. After all, the aim was not to create an innovative pictorial language—innovation, I think, was far from the patrons' minds—but to combine commonly accepted, already established models from both traditions, in order to create an all-encompassing religious realm that could meet the needs of the complex colonial society of Venetian Crete. In order for this to work, the recognizability of the visual components was a key element.

In the case of the fragmented polyptych, whose exact function still eludes us, the juxtaposition of different images of a clearly Byzantine or Italian origin in a single ensemble creates a shared devotional space capable of addressing both congregations. The ensuing recurrence of the iconography and style of each individual scene in Cretan paintings for at least the next

two centuries suggests that, in creating this composite work, the painter was asked to copy specific venerated cult images drawn from a common repertoire extant in Crete, images that patrons insisted on reproducing for more than two hundred years, in order to transfer to new religious paintings the sanctity of revered models.

In the case of the cult of St. Phanourios the abundance of evidence gives us the chance to fully comprehend Ionas Palamas's aims and the means he employed to fulfill them. Through a combination of hagiographical texts, an architectural program, wall paintings, and icons, we can study step by step the bold creation of a new saint and the promotion of his cult from the very beginning. Obviously this paper could not do justice to the wealth of material that we have on the subject—and the fact that Valsamonero remains virtually unpublished certainly does not help. But I hope I have been able to point out some key elements of this theological construction, which can be fully appreciated only in the context of early fifteenth-century Venetian Crete and in light of the aspirations of an elite circle of Cretans, who had every reason to promote the peaceful coexistence of Catholics and Orthodox on the island; a coexistence that in the tense climate of the 1430s seemed to be an attainable if controversial goal, given the ongoing negotiations over the council for the Union of the Churches.¹⁰⁰

Such pro-Union ideas were, of course, shared in that period by state dignitaries, prelates, and intellectuals in many parts of the Byzantine world. However, there are certain features of the cult of St. Phanourios that seem to point directly to Crete and to the particular conditions on the island. The emphasis on the miracle of the salvation of the Cretan priests that takes pride of place in Phanourios's Life, iconography, and hymns invests his cult with a distinctively local, Cretan flavor. It is, I believe, justifiable to view this cult as a well-thought-out attempt to shape the identity of a saint who could appeal to a community comprised of Cretans of mixed origin and diverse religious background but with convergent interests and increasingly hybrid cultural characteristics. Collaboration between an abbot with considerable theological knowledge, ambitions, and a clear political agenda and two skilled painters, one of whom, Angelos Akotantos, apparently

99 H. Hunger, "On the Imitation (ΜΙΜΗΣΙΣ) of Antiquity in Byzantine Literature," *DOP* 23–24 (1969–70): 15–38. On centos, S. McGill, *Virgil Recomposed: The Mythological and Secular Centos in Antiquity* (New York, 2005) and *The Virgilian Tradition: The First Fifteen Hundred Years*, ed. J. Ziolkowski and M. C. J. Putnam (New Haven, 2008), 471–75. I am much indebted to Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, who first introduced me to the world of centos and their significance for medieval art.

100 Z. Tsirpanlis, *Το κληροδόστημα* (n. 95 above); Th. Detorakis, "Μανουήλ Σαβίου, πρωτοψάλτη Χάνδακος, Επιτάφιος στον Αλέξιο Καλλέργη," *Θησαυρίσματα* 21 (1991): 34–42.

shared his religious and political views, points to the urban center of Candia as the melting pot where such developments could have been set in motion.

In this context it is not inopportune to mention that a few decades earlier, in 1363, the common interests of the Latin feudal overlords and the Greek population of the island had found expression in a most explosive and revealing way in the Revolt of St. Titos: leading Latin feudatory families, in collaboration with Greek-Cretan citizens, rebelled against the metropolis and declared Crete the independent republic of St. Titos. The ill-fated rebellion, which was suppressed only after considerable efforts on the part of Venice over the next three years, has been studied by preeminent historians, who have each added valuable insights to our understanding of the historical circumstances that led to the revolt and to our interpretation of its character.¹⁰¹ From an art historical point of view, however, the events of 1363–66 have not been appraised or involved in any way in our interpretation of artistic phenomena on the island. I certainly do not wish to imply that the events of 1363 are directly reflected in the cult of St. Phanourios. After all, one of the key points of the new cult was the emphasis on the observance of the laws of the Serenissima regarding the ordaining of Orthodox priests. But it is important, I believe, to remember that during the revolt of 1363 the converging interests of Latin Cretan feudatories


and Greeks on the island found expression in the emergence of a new shared religious and political symbol. One of the first acts of the rebels was to replace the lion of St. Mark with the figure of St. Titos, first bishop of Crete and protector of all Cretans regardless of origin or rite, whose banner was raised as a unifying emblem over the ducal palace of Candia.¹⁰² The political act had clear objectives: the dedication of the new republic to a local saint, revered by all the population of the island and not, for example, to the Virgin. It paints a picture of pre-existing common devotional practices and a measure of shared cultural identity centered around local cults and reinforced by kinship ties that through intermarriages bound together Latins and Greeks on the island.¹⁰³ If my reading of the polyptych is correct, this pictorial cento, as I have called it, offers us yet another tangible proof of these shared loyalties. There could not have been more fertile ground for the emergence of a new saint, whose miraculous deeds, shrine, and cult images were conceived *ab initio* to create a hospitable and spiritually comforting environment that could appeal to a unified congregation of mixed origin and reflect the aspirations of elite pro-Union circles on the Venetian colony of Crete. Or, seen from another angle, there could not have been more fertile ground for the emergence of a hybrid pictorial idiom that gave visual expression to the social realities and to the devotional needs of this diverse community.

101 See particularly the analysis by Sally McKee: “The Revolt of St Tito in Fourteenth-Century Venetian Crete: A Reassessment,” *Mediterranean Historical Review* 9 (1995): 173–204 and *Uncommon Dominion* (n. 5 above), 133–67. See also J. Jegerlehner, “Der Aufstand der kandiotischen Ritterschaft gegen das Mutterland Venedig, 1363–1365,” *BZ* 12 (1903): 78–125; F. Thiriet, “Sui dissidi sorti tra il Comune di Venezia e i suoi feudatori di Creta nel Trecento,” *ASIt* 114 (1956): 699–712 (repr. in *Études sur la Romanie gréco-vénitienne [Xe–XVe s.]* [London, 1977], VI); Ch. Maltezou, “Η Κρήτη στη διαρκεία της βενετοκρατίας (1211–1669),” in *Κρήτη: Ιστορία και Πολιτισμός*, ed. N. Panayiotakis (Crete, 1987–88), 2:107–61, esp. 125–26; M. M. Sarnataro, “La rivolta di Candia del 1363–65 nelli fonti veneziane,” *StVen* 31 (1996): 127–53.

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102 Georgopoulou, *Venice’s Mediterranean Colonies* (n. 5 above), 109–20.

103 McKee, “Greek Women” (n. 6 above); eadem, *Uncommon Dominion* (n. 5 above), esp. 168–77; Georgopoulou, *Venice’s Mediterranean Colonies*, 255–64.

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